

**TOM, DICK AND HARRY AT SCHOOL:
THE CONSTRUCTION AND REPRESENTATION OF
BOYHOOD IN SELECTED CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

by
Janice Robertson

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Department of English

School of Languages

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Supervisors:

Mrs Idette Noomé

Dr Ann Smith

To my boys,
Brandon, Michael and Gareth

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Soli Deo Gloria

SUMMARY

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This study explores constructions and representations of boyhood in selected historical and recent boys' school stories through the discourses they represent, propagate and, at times, subvert. Foucault's views on discourse form the basis of the theoretical approach adopted in this study. A literature review on the ideas distinguishing Foucault's perceptions of discourse from those of other theorists is therefore included. Raymond Williams's differentiation between dominant, emergent and residual discourses is also demonstrated to be helpful in understanding and describing the relationships between discourses. The principles of critical discourse analysis, in particular, facilitated the discussion of dominant and alternative discourses in the context of the fictional school. A comparison of the dominant discourses implicit in historical and recent publications makes it possible to assess ways in which fictional constructions of boyhood have changed or remained the same over time.

The acknowledged benchmark of traditional boys' school stories, Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), and selected school stories by authors such as Talbot Baines Reed, John Finnemore, Rudyard Kipling, Harold

Avery and Frank Richards show that the effect of dominant discourses on the representation of the protagonists in historical texts of this kind generally culminate in a replication of an archetypal ideal British schoolboy. This type of boy is constructed as being characterised by his admirable physical and moral courage, outstanding athletic prowess, honesty and strict, though cheerful, adherence to a rigid code of honour that scorns backing down from a fight, discourages the outward display of emotions and rejects any form of snitching. A range of additional related texts confirms this tradition and archetype, albeit often in a more critical portrayal of the British school system of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The contemporary works selected for detailed discussion are texts published after 1990 which arguably fall within the ambit of boys' school stories. The focus falls on the Harry Potter series (1997-2007) by J.K. Rowling, *The War of Jenkins' Ear* (1993) by Michael Morpurgo, and John van de Ruit's debut novel, *Spud: A Wickedly Funny Novel* (2005) and its sequel, *Spud – The Madness Continues* (2007).

The findings show that although the recent boys' school stories by Rowling, Morpurgo and Van de Ruit frequently include motifs and formulaic elements which are typical of traditional boys' school stories within the texts (notably the motifs of corporal punishment, the fagging system, honesty, courage and the importance of sporting matches), they do not adhere strictly to the underlying discursive framework implicit in their historical counterparts. Thus, the study suggests that the discursive predictability apparent in traditional boys' school stories is no longer present in contemporary examples of this genre. Instead, the findings of this study indicate that contemporary constructions of boyhood in the context of school are to some extent liberated from the dictates of convention, and that they have become essentially indeterminate and variable.

KEY TERMS

Boyhood

Boys' school stories

Children's literature

Discourse

Foucault

Hughes

Harry Potter

J.K. Rowling

John van de Ruit

Michael Morpurgo

Raymond Williams

Spud – The Madness Continues

Spud: A Wickedly Funny Novel

The War of Jenkins' Ear

Tom Brown's Schooldays

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

*Schooldays, so they tell us,
Are the most sublime of our lives,
We'll have the time of our lives,
It's the absolute prime of our lives.
They tell us schooldays are golden,
In the olden days, that might have been true,
But in the olden days,
They liked torture and slavery too! [...]*

*Schooldays, so they tell us,
Are the sweetest days that we'll know,
And if that really is so,
Well it comes as a bit of a blow,
Because if schooldays are the best of our
lives,
Imagine the rest of our lives!
Schooldays, schooldays, never let me go.*
(from 1959 musical adaptation of
James Hilton's *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*, 1934,
Screen Archives Entertainment)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

I still remember the day when one of my high school friends, Clint van der Linde,¹ casually announced that he was leaving the country to accept a scholarship at Eton College. For all we knew of this exclusive institution, he might just as well have announced his intention of rocketing to the moon; the glorious tradition of British boys' public schools had failed to make much of an impression on us, a group of South African learners at a school dedicated to the development of music, ballet, drama and fine art. Nevertheless, we began to comprehend how outstanding his achievement was when he explained that Eton College was situated within walking distance of Windsor Castle and that it was founded in the 1400s by King Henry VI. What made an even greater impression on most of us was that he would be attending school with young Prince William. The fact that Clint was several years older than the future heir to the British throne did not

¹ Clint is an extraordinarily talented South African counter-tenor who achieved much acclaim as a boy soprano. In 1996 he was awarded an International Scholarship to attend Eton College, where he subsequently won a Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, Scholarship that enabled him to complete a four-year Bachelor of Music degree at the Royal College of Music. One of Clint's recent performances (14 March 2009) took place in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, during which he sang counter-tenor solo for Johann Sebastian Bach's *Mass in B Minor*.

deter us from making him promise to tell us the details of the lifestyle adopted by the social elite at one of the most prestigious schools in the world.²

And so it was that during Clint's first holiday back in South Africa, we all crowded into one of the tiny practice rooms in the music department, not to belt out sections of Handel's *Messiah* under Clint's direction as we were wont to do before he left, but to sit, all agog, and listen to his anecdotes of life at Eton, all of which were told in what he assured us was distinguished Etonian English. He spoke of beaks, chambers, chapel choir, studies and common rooms – of a way of life completely foreign to me, yet one which I found (and still find) inexplicably fascinating. I had one reservation, however: were I ever so fabulously rich or extraordinarily talented, I could never share in the magnificence of Eton – that privilege is reserved for boys only.

Not that this was a new kind of disappointment for me. As a little girl I had come to the then shocking realisation that the world-famous Drakensberg Boys' Choir School was exactly that: a choir school for *boys* (only). Nonetheless, I later became well acquainted with several boys who attended this school, and I gradually gleaned a significant amount of what I presume to call 'insider knowledge'³ about the customs and activities of those fortunate enough to have been accepted (although I still think this second-hand knowledge a poor substitute for the actual experience). Nevertheless, in South Africa, old 'Drakies', as boys from the choir school refer to one another, are easier to come by than Old Etonians, or past pupils of any of the other celebrated British boys' public schools. Hence, for enlightenment regarding the mechanisms of a sector of

² According to Sir Edward Shepherd Creasy (1850:11) in *Memoirs of Eminent Etonians*, [t]he fact that Henry the Sixth was the founder of Eton College, is of itself, if carefully considered, sufficient to make his reign an epoch of national interest, not only to Etonians, who gratefully revere the "Piam Memoriam", but to all who bear in mind the influence which this great public school has exercised over the hundreds and thousands of Englishmen whose education was received within her walls. For four centuries Eton has given this country a bright and unfailing supply of "men duly qualified to serve God in Church and State." She has for four centuries been the nursing mother and the shelter of statesmen, generals, philosophers, poets, orators, judges, and divines.

³ This includes the daily routine, punishment principles, long-standing traditions, descriptions of teachers (favourable and otherwise), the hierarchical distribution of power, interesting anecdotes and the relationships between the boys. I even learnt the words to all the songs the choir performed during their 1994 tour of the United States.

society all but completely barred to me, the boys' school, I turned to the written word, fictional and autobiographical.

A genre which appealed to me enormously was the boys' school story, on account of its idealistic other-worldliness; I might even call it charm. What I discovered was the depiction of a way of life that is unique in both rationale and character, and the portrayal of a microcosm whose advocates assert its superiority without reservation or self-consciousness; in short, I became absorbed by the intriguing world of traditional British boys' public school stories.

1.2 BACKGROUND

In the early 1980s, some scholars commented on the apparent death of the traditional boys' school story. According to Musgrave (1985:1), for example, 'the genre was conceived around the middle of the [19th] century and was almost dead before the Second World War'. Quigly (1982:1) links this supposed demise of the genre to what she sees as the shifting nature and function of the public schools these books claim to represent. In *The Heirs of Tom Brown*, she argues that

...the public school in its heyday lasted for about a century [...]. Of course it existed before that and it still exists today, but not in the form made familiar by school stories to many who had never been there. [...] It was a different place – different in style and function, in atmosphere and methods, in ideas and motives, different, above all in its effect. (Quigly 1982:1)

Quigly's argument with regard to actual public schools may be valid, but several recent, and extremely popular, publications do deal with boy protagonists in the context of exclusive fictional schools.⁴ Books such as the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling, *The War of Jenkins' Ear* by Michael Morpurgo and the Spud novels by John van de Ruit cause one to enquire whether elements of the traditional boys' school story have in fact survived, and, if so, in what form. To what extent do the ideas, formulaic elements and motifs found in such recent school stories

⁴ The title of this study purposely refers to 'children's literature' rather than 'school stories' because, although the majority of the texts cited are set in schools, some of these publications may be said to go beyond the limitations of the traditional boys' school story formula.

for and/or about boys⁵ differ from those found in the historical representatives of the genre?

Given that boys' school stories generally represent the protagonists in an essentially formative stage⁶ of their lives, such considerations would clarify the particular constructions of boyhood⁷ made possible in the context of the school ethic at the time when a story is written, which is, in turn, shaped by contemporary dominant discourses (or potentially alternative or even subversive discourses)⁸ which are filtered through the texts. By comparing such discourses in the historical and recent publications respectively, it may be possible to formulate an assessment regarding the ways in which fictional depictions constructing the boyhood of boys in their schools have changed or remained unaltered after a hiatus of about half a century in the production of texts set in boarding schools.

Throughout this study, the term 'boyhood' refers to the period during which certain experiences, ideologies and modes of being contribute to the colonisation⁹ of the boy protagonist by various discourses. In other words, 'boyhood' is considered to be, as Medalie (2000:42) puts it, 'the formative *stage*' (my emphasis) of life during which boys respond to the 'modes of masculinity which are offered to them'.

⁵ At least one of the three authors whose works are explored in this study, John van de Ruit, arguably did not write his books primarily for children. Nevertheless, his protagonist is a boy, and his two books have been regarded by some as suitable for school reading (as discussed in Chapter Six).

⁶ Newberry Medalist Jerry Spinelli (1999:85) comments about his boyhood: 'In those days I was many whats. A kid can be that. Grownups have gone ahead and answered the question: "What shall I be?" They have tossed out all the whats that don't fit and have become just one. [...] But a kid is still becoming.'

⁷ In the preface to his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis ([1955] 1991:7) asserts the constructive relevance of his school recollections by claiming that these recollections, in particular, determined '*what sort of person* my childhood and adolescence had *made me*' (my emphases).

⁸ The reflexive nature of discourse (as a discursive structure at once creative and created) is addressed in Chapter Two of this study.

⁹ The notion of the colonisation of the boy in this context is based on Foucault's use of the term, which is discussed in Chapter Two.

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad aim of this study is to delineate different constructions of boyhood in the respective texts through the discourses that these texts represent, propagate and, at times, subvert. In order to achieve this, several interrelated questions have been posed.

Firstly, are there discrepancies and/or similarities between older boys' school stories (1857 to about 1950) and more recent publications (1990 to 2007) in what appears to be largely the same genre? How does the modern boy protagonist look, think and feel, and how does this construction of the protagonist compare and/or contrast with that of boy heroes of the past? How do the works that are discussed in the study treat selected issues such as the role of teachers, the fagging system, the significance of sport, and didacticism? These questions are addressed by an issues-based identification of the characteristic motifs which recur throughout most historical boys' school stories and a comparison of them to their contemporary equivalents in current children's literature.

Secondly, what is meant by the term 'discourse'? Can Michel Foucault's particular perception of discourse constitute a pivotal component of this study, and if so, how? Also, how could discourse theory be used as an effective analytical approach within the relatively new field of contemporary masculinity studies? In response to these questions, a substantial section of this study¹⁰ is dedicated to a detailed discussion of discourse theory in context.

Thirdly, in what ways, if any, have altering discourses affected the notions of integrity and honesty as essential characteristics of the ideal boy presented in children's literature? Particular consideration is given to the representation of uncompromising honesty in the boy protagonist, with special reference to recent

¹⁰ See Chapter Two.

publications,¹¹ namely the British Harry Potter series and the *Spud* novels by South African author John van de Ruit.

Finally, are there indications that the selected authors are aware of the discourses that their works propagate and do they consciously explore the possibilities of discourse (in Foucault's sense of the term) as a creative and challenging writing tool? In response to these queries, Chapters Four, Five and Six deal extensively with possible discourse subversion and contestation in the texts by J.K. Rowling, Michael Morpurgo and John van de Ruit.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In view of the fact that this is a study concerned principally with the historical and contemporary construction of boyhood and the boy protagonist in the context of school and the discourses surrounding boyhood and the exclusive boys' boarding school, it is logical that the acknowledged benchmark of traditional boys' school stories, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* by Thomas Hughes (1857), should feature prominently amongst the primary texts. Other books which are generally regarded as representative of the genre are also included as sources. These include school stories by Talbot Baines Reed, John Finnemore, Rudyard Kipling, Harold Avery and Frank Richards.¹²

Passing reference is also made to several authors' writings which, while they do not necessarily fall within the confines of the specified genre, nevertheless add value to the study. These include works by C.S. Lewis, Erich Kästner, Roald Dahl and Tobias Hill.

The contemporary works selected for extended discussion are texts published after 1990 which arguably fall within the ambit of boys' school stories.¹³ These

¹¹ Altering discourses of integrity are explored extensively in Chapters Four and Six.

¹² Frank Richards published a few Billy Bunter books after the Second World War. Thus, the primary text selection spans the period viewed by Quigly and Musgrave as the heyday of public boys' school stories.

¹³ All of these texts portray boy protagonists within the context of exclusive schools.

include *The War of Jenkins' Ear* (1993) by Michael Morpurgo, the Harry Potter series¹⁴ (1997-2007) by J.K. Rowling and John van de Ruit's debut novel, *Spud: A Wickedly Funny Novel* (2005) and its sequel, *Spud – The Madness Continues* (2007).¹⁵

1.5 CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

Although a comprehensive library search brought to light several relevant and useful secondary sources (which have been used in this study), no clear precedent or parallel to the proposed study was found. Seminal sources such as the studies by Quigly (1982) and Musgrave (1985) already mentioned above were very helpful in establishing the formula, but could not anticipate the revival of the genre which was to occur at the end of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first. Secondary sources consulted also include *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, edited by Whited (2002); *Harry Potter's World: Multidisciplinary Critical Perspectives*, edited by Heilman (2003); and *The Harry Potter Phenomenon: Literary Production, Generic Traditions, and the Question of Values*, a Master's dissertation by Glover (2003). While these sources contain sections that are relevant to this study, they do not deal with the whole Harry Potter series, as the final instalment of the series was published only in 2007.¹⁶ Studies such as 'Top Dogs and Underdogs: Insiders and Outsiders in Selected Girls' School Literature' by Noomé (2006) and *The Widening World of Children's Literature* by Ang (2000) were of limited application to this study because they either did not deal specifically with boys' school stories (Noomé 2006) or did not focus primarily on school stories (Ang 2000).

¹⁴ Although it has been argued that the *Harry Potter* series combines several different genres, a number of critics have highlighted its particular affinity with elements of traditional boys' school stories. This is discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

¹⁵ The third instalment in the series, *Spud – Learning to Fly* could not be included in this study because it was only released in June 2009, days before the final submission of the thesis.

¹⁶ As is clear from their publication dates, most of these secondary sources deal with only the first four books of the series.

A search of the National Research Foundation's NEXUS database confirmed that no detailed South African research has been published specifically on boys' school stories, the works of Michael Morpurgo, or John van de Ruit's novels. An MLA search of the Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (CSA) database showed that, internationally, no literary study of Michael Morpurgo's boys' school story, *The War of Jenkins' Ear*, has been published as yet. Searches of the SABINET, Africa Wide, Thomsons Gale and SAMedia databases confirmed the above findings. In view of these results, it is evident that, with the possible exception of the *Harry Potter* series, the field of enquiry with which the present study concerns itself is largely unexplored.

My study therefore aims to add to the existing body of literature by including recently published children's literature within its scope. It focuses not only on works by three highly acclaimed contemporary writers, but also on those written by less prominent authors who have contributed to the genre of traditional school stories, or who have written versions of this genre, such as John Finnemore¹⁷ and Harold Avery¹⁸ in the heyday of the school story. Moreover, the relevance and immediacy of this study is enhanced by the inclusion and discussion of the recent South African publications by John van de Ruit. The application of selected aspects of discourse theory provides a useful lens through which shifts in the school story and in its construction(s) of boyhood can be viewed.

1.6 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter Two presents a detailed discussion of the theoretical approach adopted in this study, as well as a clear indication of the study's position in relation to contemporary masculinity studies. Discourse theory is discussed in detail and applied to several relevant texts in order to illustrate its characteristic points. This chapter also includes a brief discussion of discourse trends, including those dominant in the representation of gender and race in children's books.

¹⁷ Finnemore is the author of the Teddy Lester school series.

¹⁸ Several extracts from Avery's *Mobsley's Mohicans* (1909) appear in Chapter Three.

Chapter Two concludes with a discussion of the relevance of discourse theory to the current study, as well as a delineation of the connotations that the term 'discourse' assumes throughout the rest of this study.

Chapter Three presents an issues-based analysis of representative historical boys' school stories. By means of a comparative approach, trends regarding aspects of the genre in selected texts are identified and discussed. These recurrent motifs are then analysed in terms of the discourse theory elaborated upon in Chapter Two. Primary texts discussed in this chapter include Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), Reed's *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* (1881), Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* (1899), Avery's *Mobsley's Mohicans* (1909) and Finnemore's *Teddy Lester* series (1908 to 1912).

Chapter Three also contains a brief discussion of the public school in relation to its fictional counterpart, including a brief discussion of the distinctive nature and purpose of such institutions in Britain. The latter part of the chapter deals with the unique position of Richards's extremely popular *Billy Bunter* series (1908 to 1940) in respect of the dominant discourses identified in the traditional boys' school stories investigated in this study.

Chapters Four, Five and Six focus on selected recent publications that depict boy protagonists in the context of school. Discourses which characterise traditional school stories are compared with similar or alternative discourses propagated in these (to some extent non-conformist) texts. Subversions of commonly accepted norms with particular reference to the issues highlighted in Chapter Three are identified and discussed.

Chapter Four posits a reading of the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) by J.K. Rowling as a school story. It is in the context of traditional school stories that conventional and subversive aspects of the discourses represented in the *Harry Potter* books are analysed and discussed. Moreover, the effect of these

discourses on the construction and representation of Harry's character is explored.

Chapter Five deals with Michael Morpurgo's thought-provoking boys' school story, *The War of Jenkins' Ear* (1993). Although Morpurgo was awarded the 'Children's Laureate' title (2003-2005), his books have so far been largely ignored by the academic fraternity. Nevertheless, his representation of the boys' school story genre in this book is so exceptional in style, character and discursive content that it warrants closer scrutiny. The discourse of Muscular Christianity, for example, which is dominant in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, is thrown into stark relief by Morpurgo's representation of an alternative discourse.

Chapter Six concerns itself with the first two of the recently published bestselling novels by John van de Ruit. In this chapter, the salient features of *Spud: A Wickedly Funny Novel* (2005) and *Spud – The Madness Continues* (2007) are identified and compared with those commonly found in historical boys' school stories. The similarities and/or differences between the chronologically disparate texts are discussed in terms of discourse theory, as well as the effect the implied discourses have on the representation and construction of the protagonist's fictional South African boyhood.

Chapter Seven concludes this study. The significant findings and observations of the previous chapters are summarised in this section. I assess the conventional or subversive discourses identified in Chapters Four, Five and Six in terms of the liberating and/or constraining effect they have on the fictional representations and potential constructions of contemporary boyhood within the context of school.

CHAPTER TWO

DISCOURSE THEORY IN CONTEXT

Discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but it is the thing for which and by which there is a struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.

(Foucault [1970] 1981:59)

2.1 BACKGROUND

My interest in boyhood and masculinity studies was sparked by the arrival of my first son. Before being confronted with the challenge of raising a happy and fulfilled male child and equipping him for a successful and balanced role in society, I hardly considered masculinity studies a worthwhile area of enquiry. In fact, I accepted the cliché ‘boys will be boys’, which implies that, regardless of external factors, social conditioning and restrictive parameters, the inherent maleness (whatever that may be) of boys will succeed in manifesting itself in the boy child. According to Balswick (1992:12), a contemporary masculinity studies scholar, ‘[t]hroughout most of history it was taken for granted that men acted like men because that was their *nature*’ (my emphasis). The same logic is generally applied to boys. Nevertheless, considering the very different kinds of boys – real and fictional – that I have encountered, this argument seems to reflect a gross oversimplification of a much more complex matter.

For instance, in *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*, Sue Townsend (1984:29) illustrates Adrian’s growing realisation that he is not living up to the (completely divergent) images of boyhood envisaged by either of his parents. The extract bears testament, in my opinion, to the non-universality and variability of boyhood by delineating two completely different constructions of boyhood. With bitter-sweet honesty, Adrian records his parents’ responses to his simple question “What sort of son do you want then?” as follows:

Their answer took us all around Sainsbury's, through the queue at the checkout, and back to the multi-story car park.

My father's ideal son was a natural athlete, he was cheerful and outgoing, he was a fluent linguist, he was tall with unblemished ruddy cheeks, he took off his hat to ladies. He went fishing with his father and swapped jokes. [...] He would vote conservative and would marry into a good family. He would set up his own computer business in Guildford.

However, my mother's ideal son would be intense and saturnine. He would go to a school for the Intellectually Precocious. He would fascinate girls and women at an early age, he would enthral visitors with his witty conversation. He would wear his clothes with panache, he would be completely non-sexist, non-agist, non-racist. (His best friend would be an old African woman.) [...]

When they'd both finished spouting on I said, "Well I'm sorry if I'm a disappointment to you."

While Townsend is clearly exaggerating the differences between these distinctly opposed perspectives of the ideal boy in order to highlight the divergent socio-political standpoints of Adrian's parents, this extract nevertheless demonstrates the limitless forms the hypothetical ideal boy could assume.

The fallaciousness of common assumptions regarding predictable boyhood first struck me when I had to respond to behaviour in my eldest son that was not congruent with society's perceptions of what is desirable in a boy. While some people may argue that there are many ways of being a boy, it is still undeniable that some ways of being a boy are *valued more than others* in certain spheres. So, what guidance should I give my son when, for example, he *publicly* expresses his hurt in a display of profuse tears after being given the cold shoulder by an old friend? My son is deeply sensitive and caring, a quality which I value very highly and one which I constantly seek to nurture, and yet it is this quality which causes him to be frowned upon by others as diverging from the 'cowboys don't cry' model and consequently to be labelled a 'cry-baby'. Although I would like my son to respect and value his emotional life, I do not wish him to feel ostracised or marginalised because of it. Such complex challenges caused me to reassess my assumptions about 'natural' and inevitable boyhood as a generic norm and motivated me to consult texts from a wide range of genres which address various aspects of masculinity in diverse social contexts.

Wannamaker (2008:25), a children's literature expert, highlights the problem associated with the generalisation of uncontested notions of apparently predictable boyhood by suggesting that when 'boys just are, then boyhood takes on a universal quality – boyhood is the norm against which (abnormal) girlhood is measured'. According to Stephens (2002:x), the influence of various feminisms on society has caused the application of gender studies to children's texts to become focused predominantly on issues of female representation; he claims that this is

hardly surprising, given the substantial impact of feminism on children's literature and culture during the past quarter century, and its reflection of a wider feminist agenda to understand and change the social and textual structures through which patriarchy has attempted to regulate female bodies and behaviours. The question of how the same patriarchal ideology structured representations of male bodies and behaviours seemed less urgent, and has only very recently emerged as an issue.

Statements such as these caused me to examine more closely the constraining or liberating representations of boyhood as they appear in children's literature in particular.

In *Tom, Dick and Harry: the construction and representation of boyhood in selected children's literature*, I attempt a comparative analysis of the 'social and textual structures' that are not only presented but also celebrated (and occasionally subverted) in traditional British boys' school stories and the representations of similar or different constructs in contemporary literature in the same genre or related genres. I chose to look at historical boys' school literature as a basis for discussion because this genre is characterised by some of the earliest depictions of what constitutes apparently desirable 'manliness' in children's literature and clear representations of what was, at the time, considered to be the ideal boy. In this study, the depiction of boyhood in historical texts is contrasted with the representation and construction of boyhood in selected recent texts. My enquiry is therefore situated within the relatively new

field of contemporary masculinity studies, which may, in turn, be seen to fall within the broad parameters of cultural studies.¹⁹

Since the concept of culture is potentially complex and bewildering, I have chosen Raymond Williams's composite definition of culture as a point of departure. Accordingly, I regard culture not only as 'a noun of "inner" process, specialised to its presumed agencies in "intellectual life" and "the arts"' (Williams 1977:17), but more particularly as 'a constitutive social process, creating specific and different "ways of life"' (Williams 1977:19). Williams ([1961] 2001:58) suggests that culture 'includes the organisation of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships, [and] the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate'.

The culture of boys' public boarding school is a prime example of the culture of an institution which governs, within its microcosmic scope and beyond, the social relationships and forms of communication it upholds and seeks to perpetuate. Boys' school stories offer useful insights into the ways in which such governance operates and the methods that are employed to ensure the continuance of the traditions and hierarchical structures that dictate behaviour and collectively constitute the culture of such schools.

Roald Dahl (1977:189) presents a wonderfully concise, though brutally honest (and, of necessity, subjective) summary of how the typical British boys' boarding school's way of life was governed and preserved – by a relentless and often cruel administration of corporal punishment: 'Those were days of horror, of fierce discipline, of no talking in the dormitories, no running in the corridors, no untidiness of any sort, no this or that or the other, just rules and still more rules that had to be obeyed. And the fear of the dreaded cane hung over us like the

¹⁹ I make this assertion on the basis of the observation made by Sardar and Van Loon (1998:8) that 'cultural studies is not one thing, it is many things. It straddles the intellectual and academic landscape from old established disciplines to new political movements, intellectual practices and modes of enquiry such as Marxism, post-colonialism, feminism and post-structuralism'.

fear of death all the time.’ It is clear from this extract that corporal punishment ensured conformity to the rules which promoted apparently desirable behaviour in the public school that Dahl refers to.

In the following extract from C.S. Lewis’s *Surprised by Joy*, the author attempts to explain logically the reasons for the uncontested authority of the members of the school aristocracy and the resultant perpetuation of the ‘governing class’ of senior boys called the ‘Bloods’:

At [Wyvern College] the lowest social class of all [small new boys] were too young, therefore *too weak, to dream of a revolt*. In the middle class – boys who were no longer fags but not yet Bloods – those who alone had physical strength and popularity enough to qualify them as leaders of a revolution were already beginning to hope for Bloodery themselves. It *suited them better to accelerate their social progress by courting the existing Bloods* than to risk a revolt which, in the unlikely event of it succeeding, would destroy the very prize they were longing to share. And if at last they despaired of ever doing so – why, by that time their schooldays were nearly over. Hence, the Wyvernian constitution [of hierarchical schoolboy power] was unbreakable. (Lewis [1955] 1991:71; my emphases)

As Lewis’s comments suggest, the *cultural practices* of the school (such as fagging, caning and the initiation of younger boys) *ensure* that its hierarchical traditions (however irksome or irrational they may seem to the uninitiated and oppressed) are passed on, perfectly intact, to the next generation of schoolboys.

2.2 DISCOURSE THEORY

Because I have adopted a cultural studies perspective on the study of the constitutive social processes that create specific ways of life, in this case in the world of the (fictional) boys’ boarding school, I consider critical discourse analysis a particularly useful theoretical approach, in that it offers ‘a means of exposing or deconstructing the social practices which constitute “social structure” and what we might call the conventional meaning structures of social life’ (Jaworski & Coupland 1999:6). That being said, it is essential for me to clarify my (somewhat eclectic) view of discourse; one which has been shaped by the definitions posited by various theorists.

I draw my basic definition of discourse from Michel Foucault. According to Fairclough (1993:37), Foucault had much to do with the popularisation of the concept of 'discourse' and of discourse analysis as a field of intellectual and theoretical enquiry. Moreover, his work makes an important contribution to a social theory of discourse in such areas as the relationship of discourse and power, the discursive construction of social subjects and knowledge, and the functioning of discourse in social change (Fairclough 1993:38). According to Foucault ([1972] 2003:49), one of the most productive ways of thinking of discourse is not merely as a group of signs or a portion of text, but as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'. In the same vein, Mills (2004:15) suggests that discursive structures can be detected because of the 'systematicity of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context, and because of the effects of those ways of thinking and behaving' (Mills 2004:15).

For example, when viewed from this perspective, the rigorously upheld traditions and practices of boys' public schools (such as an almost exclusively classical education and an extreme appreciation for, and support of, sporting endeavours) are clearly intended to *produce* the ideal British public schoolboy so highly commended by such institutions. For example, in a more recent boys' school story, *The War of Jenkins' Ear* by Michael Morpurgo, the author's description of Hunter, the venerated captain of the school, constitutes what may be considered to be the successful, cumulative result of the practices endorsed by the school system:

Hunter was king of the castle at Redlands, Captain of School and Captain of just about everything else too. He played every *sport* there was and played them better than anyone else. He always went home at the end of each term with armfuls of cups and prizes. He threw a *javelin* further than any one else of his age in the country. He was national *champion*. Tall, lithe, a *crown* of close-cropped dark hair, he looked like a *Greek warrior* out of the history books (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:22, my emphases).

With his unmistakably classical sporting pursuits and physique, and his implied support of the social, intellectual and recreational practices of the school, this

character clearly represents the embodiment of the intended effect of the discourses that inform, underpin and uphold such traditions and practices (that particular culture).

What is significant here for discourse analysis, and hence for my study in general, is the perception of discourse as constitutive – as contributing to the production, transformation and reproduction of the objects and subjects of social life. This view suggests that discourse is in an active relation to reality and that language signifies reality by constructing meaning for it (Fairclough 1993:41). Moreover, it follows that discourse and language stand in similar relations to what I venture to call ‘fictional reality’ – the imagined realistic or fantastic content of texts which cannot but be influenced, and, to some extent, created by the dictates of some discursive structure or another.

Consider, for example, the meaning and underlying constitutive discourse implied in the term ‘Muggle’ in the following excerpt from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*,²⁰ in which Mr Dursley attempts to forbid Harry from attending the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry:

“He’s not going,” [Mr Dursley] said.

Hagrid grunted.

“I’d like to see a great Muggle *like you* stop him,” he said.

“A what?” said Harry, interested.

“Muggle,” said Hagrid. “It’s what we call non-magic folk *like them*. An’ it’s your *bad luck* you grew up in a family o’ the *biggest Muggles* I ever laid eyes on.”

(Rowling 1997:43, my emphases)

Since the word ‘Muggle’ is not recognised as an actual English word – neither the 2007 edition of the *Oxford Concise Dictionary* nor the 2008 edition of the *Cambridge Advanced Dictionary* carries a definition for it – and since the word

²⁰ Excerpts from the Harry Potter series which are cited in this chapter do not form part of the main reading of the books which is presented in Chapter Four. They are included here merely as relevant examples drawn from the greater school story genre.

occurs in only lesser-known publications,²¹ the reader has to depend almost entirely on the clues and signs presented in the text to assimilate the meaning of the term. There appears to be a semiotic link with one of the informal connotations of the noun ‘mug’ – which denotes a stupid and gullible person – so the reader may already suspect that this is not an altogether flattering term. However, it is Hagrid’s scathing use of the term in this context which alerts the reader to an underlying discourse that suggests that the term ‘Muggle’ represents more than an objective classification of a non-magic person. In this case, language recreates for the reader – and yet is simultaneously constrained by – Hagrid’s (and, by implication, also the rest of the wizarding world’s) perception of ‘Muggles’ as decidedly inferior beings who are easily fooled and inevitably foolish (though admittedly in differing degrees). Subsequent appearances of the term confirm this impression and thus, through the agency of language,²² the reality – albeit fictional – of ‘muggle’ representation and existence is established as the (utterly and completely) excluded alternative to the dominant discourse of magic.

Yet, in terms of the dominant discourses that inform and dictate what constitutes an acceptable ‘way of life’ for the Dursleys (who are, after all, just non-magical human beings like you and me), it is, rather, the abnormal lifestyle and culture of wizarding folk that should be treated with misgiving. As Mr Dursley says to his wife, in reference to wizards, “‘I’m not having one in the house, Petunia! Didn’t we swear when we took him in that we’d stamp out that dangerous nonsense?’” (Rowling 1997:31). In fact, we know with certainty that the Dursleys considered themselves as conforming to the dominant discourses of their society from the opening statement of the very first book: ‘Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four,

²¹ Writer Nancy Stouffer brought charges against J.K. Rowling in 1999 for copyright infringement, citing resemblances between the Harry Potter books and her own work, including *Rah* (1987), involving characters named Larry Potter, his friend Lilly, and creatures called ‘muggles’. The case was dismissed and Stouffer was fined for misrepresentation of intellectual property and fraudulent activities (Whited 2002:5).

²² Tony Morrison’s Nobel Prize speech on the agency in language represents, quite superbly, the complex relationship between language and that which it constructs. Morrison explains that ‘we do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do, language is a name for our doing: both ‘what’ we do and that which we affect, the act and its consequence’ (quoted in Skulnick & Goodman 2003:271).

Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were *perfectly normal*, thank you very much' (Rowling 1997:7, my emphasis). This is a clear illustration of the debatable value of the 'truths' implicit in discourses which have attained a degree of dominance within the particular cultural contexts and social paradigms that propagate them.

This intentional disruption of the sense of what is *normal* is one of Foucault's particular areas of interest. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he asserts that all

these pre-existing forms of continuity, all these syntheses that are accepted without question, must remain in suspense. They must not be rejected definitely of course, but the tranquillity with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come about of themselves, but are always the result of a construction, the rules of which must be known, and the justification of which must be scrutinised: we must define in what conditions and in view of which analyses certain of them are legitimate; and we must indicate which of them can never be accepted in any circumstances. (Foucault [1972] 2003:28)

Furthermore, according to Foucault, discourses do not exist in a vacuum, but are in constant conflict with other discourses and the social practices which inform them over questions of truth and authority (Mills 2004:17). He comments: 'I want to try to discover how the choice of truth, inside which we are caught but which we ceaselessly renew, was made – but also how it was repeated, renewed and displaced' (Foucault [1970]1981:70). In other words, Foucault is not so much preoccupied with deciding which discourse is an accurate or true representation of the real, but rather with the mechanics whereby one discourse becomes regarded as a dominant or legitimate discourse, while another is regarded with suspicion and is placed (metaphorically and literally) at the margins of a given society (Mills 2004:17).

The following excerpt illustrates just how ambiguous and subjective choices of truth (in this instance, reflected in language usage) can be. In 'The Boy from New York City', a short story by Marcel Feigel in *The Puffin Book of School Stories*, Sal, a worldly-wise new boy from the Big Apple, attempts to explain the connotations of the word 'bad' to his confused British school friends:

“No, you got it wrong. You see where I come from bad is good. Because to be bad means that you’re really cool. So if everybody goes around saying, ‘Who, that dude is bad,’ then he’s really somebody.” [...]

Now it was Freddie’s turn. “Then the best is really the worst,” he said.

“No, no,’ Sal said. “There is no worst. You mean the baddest.”

Now we were all puzzled again. “The baddest? What’s that?” Digby asked.

“That sounds like it’s incorrect,” Adrian added.

“The baddest,” Sal said patiently, “is the best. It’s the ultimate. The king. It’s being supercool. Now you guys got that?”
(Feigel 1992:111)

Although this extract deals primarily with the problem of truth and accuracy in language use, Sal’s comment, ‘where I come from bad is good’ can be viewed as representative of the conflict existing between discourses on every level. In other words, the ‘choices of truth’ to which Foucault refers are always open for appraisal and contestation by alternative points of view; the question then becomes one of discursive perspective – where you come from.

Raymond Williams’s theoretical model of cultural elements corresponds, to some extent, with Foucault’s perception of the conflict existing between dominant and alternative discourses. Williams (1977:121) categorises various and often widely disparate cultural elements as belonging to dominant, residual or emergent social structures. While in this context, Williams’s term ‘dominant’ refers to what Foucault calls the ‘effective’ or ‘hegemonic’ discourses, it is significant that this dominance ‘is never either total or exclusive. At any time, forms of *alternative* or *directly oppositional* politics and culture *exist as significant elements* in the society’ (Williams 1977:113; my emphases). Williams (1977:123) clarifies his definition of an ‘emergent’ or alternative cultural element in terms of its relationship to the dominant discourse:

By “emergent” I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture [...] and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel.

According to Williams's theory, 'residual' discourses incorporate those cultural elements which have been formed in the past but are still active in the dominant discourse of the present (Williams 1977:122). In order to clarify the position of residual elements in a given context, it is necessary to distinguish them from what Williams calls 'archaic' elements. The 'archaic' is 'that which is wholly recognised as an element of the past, to be observed, to be examined, or even on occasion to be "revived", in a deliberately specializing way' (Williams 1977:122). The residual, however, is that which has been 'effectively *formed* in the past, but ... is *still active* in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but *as an effective element of the present*' (Williams 1977:122; my emphases). Such residual elements can, moreover, have 'an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture', or they may be 'incorporated into the dominant culture' (Williams 1977:122). Religious beliefs, folklore and inherited superstitious conventions could therefore be classified as predominantly residual discourses.

To illustrate the relationships between these theoretical discursive positions, I draw on Lütz van Dijk's recent young adult novel entitled *Crossing the Line* (2006). The book tells the story of Themba Matakane, a teenage schoolboy and talented soccer player, who tries to come to terms with the effect of AIDS on his family and, ultimately, with the knowledge that he is HIV positive. The dominant discourse (upheld by the majority of the rural community in which Themba lives) regards AIDS as a completely unmentionable subject²³ and advocates that those who contract the disease should be shunned, or at the very least, treated with disdain by the members of the community. This dominant discourse is supported by the residual discourse that views the disease as a deserved punishment to be borne by those who have trespassed against the tribal (and in this case also Christian) laws which forbid fornication and loose living.

²³ After hearing that his mother is 'infected with the *HI-Virus*', Themba reflects that 'AIDS is still denied and kept secret, even by some politicians and otherwise quite educated people' (Van Dijk 2006:106).

The emergent discourse (portrayed through the words and actions of other characters in the story, such as Themba's sister, Nomtha), however, claims that the only way to deal and cope with HIV and AIDS is to make one's status known and discuss the condition and its treatment with a professional. This emergent discourse does not countenance the tendency to ostracise HIV patients, but rather suggests that the disease may have been transmitted by means of rape (as in the protagonist's case) or by birth and is not necessarily a side-effect of promiscuity. Moreover, it stresses the point that the only way to protect others from infection lies in open discussion of the characteristics and treatment of the disease.

2.3 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

In consequence of Michel Foucault's thought-provoking theories, a relatively new branch of research methodology that is generally referred to as critical discourse analysis came into being. Critical discourse analysts frequently acknowledge Foucault's work as fundamental to their field of enquiry. Mills draws attention to two main aspects of Foucault's approach to discourse studies that are of particular interest to proponents of critical discourse analysis. The first is the 'constitutive nature of discourse – discourse constitutes the social' (Mills 2004:133), as previously illustrated. The second is 'the primacy of inter-discursivity and intertextuality – any discursive practice is defined by its relation with others, and draws upon others in complex ways' (Mills 2004:134).

Consider, for example, the following excerpt from *The Secret Super Hero* (published in 2006 as part of the 'Books for Boys' series by Ian Whybrow) in which different, essentially conflicting discourses regarding competitive sports are analysed by the young schoolboy protagonist, Alan:

Sports day in our school is rubbish. The day before, Mrs Dreary, our Head, she was on stage. She said to us, "Just to remind you, children, there will [be] no cups or medals awarded tomorrow. Everyone is going to take part purely for the fun of taking part. You are *all* winners in my school and that's all that matters to me."

I didn't get it. I like getting a prize if I win something. So I didn't bother to enter for anything.... (Whybrow 2006:15)

Although much can be said about the respective perspectives on the value of competitive sports in the school environment, my reason for including this extract is rather to draw attention to the relationship – the mutual affiliation – between these discursive perspectives. Each discourse is not only opposed, but also, to a certain extent, defined by its rival; we see the Head's propagation of a non-competitive discourse more clearly for what it is when it is juxtaposed against Alan's decidedly oppositional way of thinking. Hence, each stands in a complex constructive, yet ultimately opposing association with the other.

According to Fairclough (in Locke 2004:1), the aim of critical discourse analysis is

to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power.

Locke (2004:2) asserts that critical discourse analysis views human subjectivity as, at least in part, constructed or inscribed by discourse, and 'discourse as manifested in the various ways people *are* and *enact* the sorts of people they are'. This aspect of discourse is well captured by James Gee (1996:127) in his definition of discursive practices as ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking and writing that are accepted as 'instantiations' of particular types of people by specific groups of people. 'Discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life'.

Take, for example, Rowling's depiction of culture in the world of witches and wizards. When Harry Potter has his first significant encounter (since babyhood) with a wizard, Rubeus Hagrid, the fact that Harry (though familiar with the Muggle way of life) knows nothing of the 'ways of being' in the magical community, is made clear by the gamekeeper's expostulation:

“Do you mean ter tell me,” he growled at the Dursleys, “that this boy – this boy! – knows nothin’ abou’ – about ANYTHING?”

Harry thought this was going a bit far. He had been to school, after all, and his marks weren’t bad.

“I know *some* things,” he said. “I can, you know, do maths and stuff.”

But Hagrid simply waved his hand and said, “About *our* world, I mean. *Your* world. *My* world. *Yer parents’ world.*” (Rowling 1997:41)

Harry soon sees the validity of Hagrid’s remarks. Although he is apparently proficient in mathematics and several other Muggle branches of knowledge, he is completely ignorant of the ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing and speaking which collectively reflect the discourses and cultural characteristics of the wizarding world. He knows nothing of this ‘form of life’. It is the aim of critical discourse analysis to deconstruct, analyse and discuss such discursive practices in context.

Furthermore, critical discourse analysts view reality as being ‘textually and intertextually mediated via verbal and non-verbal language systems’ and it is because of this phenomenon that texts themselves form ‘ideal sites for both the inculcation and the contestation of discourses’ (Locke 2004:2). This consideration forms the premise of Locke’s assertion that the systematic analysis and interpretation of texts may be ‘potentially revelatory of ways in which discourses consolidate power and colonise human subjects through often covert position calls’ (Locke 2004:2).

This has particular value for the study of the ‘colonisation’ or control mechanisms employed in the attempt to make model British public school boys out of (often admittedly unwilling) subjects. For example, C.S. Lewis describes the overwhelming attack on new boys in the school with distinct irony:

Obviously a certain grave danger was ever-present to the minds of those who built up the Wyvernian hierarchy. It seemed to them self-evident that, if you left things to themselves, boys of nineteen who played rugger for the county and boxed for the school would everywhere be knocked down and sat on by boys of thirteen. And that, you know, would be a very shocking spectacle. The most elaborate mechanism, therefore, had to be devised for protecting the strong against the weak, the close corporation of Old Hands against the parcel of new-

comers who were strangers to one another and to everyone in the place, the poor, trembling lions against the furious and ravening sheep. (Lewis [1955] 1991:87)

As Lewis ([1955] 1991:88) suggests, these mechanisms of power (such as flogging, caning, bullying and initiation) are often considered invaluable by persons in authority as the means of subjugating those who behave in non-conformist ways and of perpetuating discourses and their associated practices. Moreover, texts which deal with the implementation of such devices offer useful insights into the ways in which this 'colonisation' or conformity to the prescribed norm is achieved.

As previously mentioned, 'intertextuality'²⁴ is a vital component of critical discourse analysis. In its original form, this term could be defined as 'the propensity of texts to refer to others and to be constructed by that reference to other texts' (Mills 2004:137). Consider, for example, the following extract from *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*, in which an American acquaintance, Hamish Mancini, comes to England in order to experience Adrian's school (Townsend 1984:41):

I took Hamish to see how an English comprehensive school works today. The only previous knowledge he had of English schools was taken from reading *Tom Brown's Schooldays* so Hamish was a bit disappointed to find that ritual floggings and roastings have been done away with.

This overt reference to the pioneer boys' school story presents a clear illustration of the (often more subtle) role of intertextuality. Without having to provide detailed descriptions of characteristic aspects of public school life, Townsend's casual reference to *Tom Brown's Schooldays* alerts the reader to Hamish's

²⁴ Fairclough (1993:103), a pioneering critical discourse analyst, broadened the connotations of the term in his book, *Discourse and Social Change*:

The concept of intertextuality points to the productivity of texts, to how texts can transform prior texts and restructure existing conventions (genres, discourses) to generate new ones. But this productivity is not in practice available to people as a limitless space for textual innovation and play: it is socially limited and constrained, and conditional upon relations of power. The theory of intertextuality cannot itself account for these social limitations, so it needs to be combined with a theory of power relations and how they shape (and are shaped by) social structures and practices.

(misinformed) expectations. What the American boy is no doubt hoping for is a personal encounter with the customs and cultural elements presented in this historical publication. For him, all British schools must, amongst other things, be swarming with discontented fags, unreasonable prefects and overbearing masters who make constant use of corporal punishment to subjugate their juniors. Of course, as Adrian, in fact, attends a co-educational English Comprehensive Grammar School, Hamish's expectations are, inevitably, dashed. Furthermore, Townsend's decision to mention *Tom Brown's Schooldays* provides the means for further construction and extension of her own story by eliciting a sub-narrative comparison of the school experience she presents in her story with the experience presented in Thomas Hughes's celebrated novel.

Locke (2004:89) highlights the usefulness of critical discourse analysis for revealing the 'discursive substratum' beneath the relatively opaque surface of texts. He emphasises that the intention of this research methodology is to provide opportunities for critical detachment and review of the many ways in which discourses act to pervade and construct textual and social practices in a range of contexts.

In this study, the guiding principles of critical discourse analysis are employed in order to facilitate the exploration and discussion of the discourses which 'pervade and construct' fictional representations of the boy protagonist in school through the analysis of the 'textual and social practices' (or recurrent motifs and formulaic elements) that characterise works of this genre.

2.4 DISCOURSE AND POWER

Foucault's work places particular emphasis on power struggles regarding the determination of discursive practices. He clarifies his perception of the relationship between discourse and power by positing that 'discourse *transmits* and *produces* power; it *reinforces* it, but also undermines it and *exposes* it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it' (Foucault [1972] 1993:340;

my emphases). Furthermore, in 'The Order of Discourse', Foucault ([1970] 1981:59) emphasises that discourse 'is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but it is the thing for which and by which there is a struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized'.

According to Mills (2004:17), Foucault has been instrumental in the move to reassess models of power. Rather than simply assuming that power is the possession of rights or a violation of someone's rights, Foucault has attempted to penetrate the complexity of the range of practices which can be regarded as attributes of power. In his view, power is dispersed throughout social relations, producing and representing possible forms of behaviour, as well as restricting behaviour. He asserts that 'power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (Foucault [1972] 1993:334).

To illustrate this theoretical standpoint, I refer to a recent local incident that gave the general media a field day and put a (rather discomfited) top Johannesburg boys' school under the spotlight. On 2 February 2009, several Grade 11 boarders were allegedly 'dragged out of bed at midnight, stripped naked and tortured until some of them bled' (Serrao 2009:1). After having to endure a degrading ordeal, during which they were, amongst other indignities, repeatedly beaten with a variety of blunt instruments including cricket bats, hockey sticks and golf clubs, the victims were finally abused by the boarding school head boy. He reportedly used a whip to hit the Grade 11 boys on their lower backs and buttocks until he drew blood. 'Apparently, the ceremony was the price the grade elevens had to pay to bring a kettle into their hostel room' (Serrao 2009:1). All of this would, I do not doubt, have escaped the public eye, had one of the boys not given a truthful explanation of his festering wounds (which had not yet healed after a week) to his concerned mother, who immediately set about exposing the whole affair. A short while later, after a lot of negative publicity, the school authorities announced that the perpetrators, as well as a teacher who was allegedly informed about the proceedings, had been arrested by the police and suspended from the school, pending further discussions (Ritchie 2009:1).

It is not the object of this study to condone or condemn the actions of any of the parties involved, but rather to illustrate the complex distribution of power among them. The perpetrators, on one hand, evidently felt secure in their position of relative authority and consequent 'right' to use violence against the boys they regarded as their inferiors, not least because a teacher not only knew about their plans, but also apparently endorsed them. The teacher, nevertheless, seems to have been very aware of the potential danger arising from the chance that one of the younger boys would blow the whistle on the episode – and he tried to prevent this by commanding the victims to preserve silence (Ritchie 2009:2). This is an example of one of the most commonly identified displays of power, the hierarchical oppression of the lower classes within a relatively isolated sector of society. In this case (as in many such cases), most of the victims saw themselves as powerless in the face of such domination, thus submitting themselves to the arguably tyrannical regime.

By contrast, however, the consequences which followed one boy's decision to speak about the incident (whether voluntarily or under the pressure of parental coercion) illustrate the power that not only he, but also every other victim, actually possesses. The overwhelming response from the media and the barrage of interrogations and far-reaching investigations which followed were (almost certainly) not anticipated by the perpetrators. Nevertheless, the simple act of speaking out caused not only the public embarrassment, but also the suspension and arrest of those who thought themselves to be above reprisal. On an even higher level, the Department of Education is conducting an investigation into allegations that learners at the school are being subjected to violence, humiliation and rites that undermine their dignity. Consequently, as reported by the *Saturday Star*, "The school is sombre, [...] The heart has been ripped out by all of this" (Ritchie 2009:2). But the story is not over yet, and it remains to be seen whether other teachers, parents or boys will use the available mechanisms of power to ostracise or punish the boy whose mother was responsible for the negative publicity. Thus, consideration of this real-life boys' school episode demonstrates,

in concrete terms, Foucault's assertion that 'power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (Foucault [1972] 1993:334).

Frow (cited in Mills 2004:17) expresses it thus: 'If power is no longer thought [of] simply as a negative and repressive force but as the condition of production of all speech, and if power is conceived as polar rather than monolithic, as an asymmetrical dispersion, then all utterances will be potentially splintered, formally open to contradictory uses'. Moreover, Foucault ([1972] 1993:340) suggests that

[d]iscourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.

Locke (2004:1) states that power in society is not so much something which is imposed on individual subjects, but rather the inevitable effect of the way particular discursive configurations or arrangements privilege the status of some people over others.

Considering the apparently unavoidably hierarchical nature of schools (fictional and actual), it is not surprising that this particular environment should be fraught with continual displays and contestations of discourses of power. Moreover, Foucault regards children as an oppressed sector of society, a group that is generally subjugated and controlled in various ways.²⁵

The most obvious manifestations of power relationships within the school context occur between students and teachers. The relative disparity of their respective positions within the hierarchy of the microcosm in which they function dictates, to a large extent, the *unequal dispersion* of power that characterises the majority of interactions between children and persons in authority. Moreover, in historical

²⁵ Alexander (2005) refers to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1977) in which Foucault examines the methods of punishment employed in Mettray, the first European prison for children. A significant form of punishment was 'silencing' of the child perpetrator.

boys' school stories, the teachers and prefects generally have the upper hand, in that they have the parentally endorsed right to control even the youngest boys with severe corporal punishment. As Roald Dahl (1977:192) bitterly recalls:

That cruel cane ruled our lives. We were caned for talking in the dormitory after lights out, for talking in class, for bad work, for carving our initials on the desk, for climbing over walls, for slovenly appearance, for flicking paper clips, for not hanging up our games clothes, and above all for giving the slightest offence to any master. (They weren't called teachers in those days.) In other words, we were caned for doing everything that it was natural for small boys to do.

Life was made all the more difficult for these boys in that the option of confiding in their parents (who, more often than not, lived so far away as to make them quite inaccessible) was of little or no use. In fact, I have been told by men who, as boys, complained at home about school thrashings that the only reward they had received for their trouble was an extra hard thrashing from the honourable parent, who held that the school punishment must have been justly deserved. On account of the prevailing discourse of the time, which sanctioned corporal punishment, therefore these already vulnerable young boys seem to have been rendered all but entirely powerless by the public school system.

Nevertheless, theatrical canings and ritual beatings are not the only means of exercising power in the school environment. The following excerpt from *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, for example, constitutes a prime fictional example of the more subtly implemented, though unmistakably authoritative, manifestation of the unequal power dispersion between Harry and his headmaster, Professor Albus Dumbledore:

A hot, prickly feeling of shame spread from the top of Harry's head all the way down his body. Dumbledore had not raised his voice, he did not even sound angry, but Harry would have preferred him to yell; this cold disappointment was worse than anything. [...]

Silence fell between them again, the most uncomfortable silence Harry had ever experienced with Dumbledore; it seemed to go on and on. [...]

Harry felt strangely diminished, as though he had shrunk a little since he had entered the room. (Rowling 2005:401)

Despite the fact that Harry generally enjoys a good, functional relationship with Dumbledore, the headmaster's exercise of power through the imposition of silence nevertheless succeeds in impressing on Harry's mind a sense of his own insignificance (implicit in his feeling of being 'diminished') in comparison with Dumbledore's importance.

Moreover, as previously implied, manifestations of power within the school context also occur between students and other students, either in a formalised hierarchy (for example, between senior students and younger ones, or between prefects and the rest of the school, or between 'master' and 'fag'), or in a pecking order based on age, size, strength, popularity, sporting prowess or any other element that creates asymmetry between the students. The resulting uneven distribution of power in the school frequently becomes apparent in bullying²⁶ and other forms of oppression that dictate the behaviour of less powerful students. While bullying is generally represented in a negative light, other methods of coercion are frequently deemed 'necessary' or 'natural' to reinforce the importance of conformation to the school ethic and its defining discourses.²⁷ Some of these methods are discussed in Chapter Three.

²⁶ Susanne Gervay's thought-provoking schoolboy novel *I am Jack* (2001) describes bullying from the victim's perspective.

... I [Jack] can hear them throwing things and shouting. George Hamel's voice echoes against the walls. I can't help shuddering. Why do they hate me? I'm alone in the middle dressing [cubicle]. My head's throbbing. I get changed as quickly as I can. Panic. Don't cry, Jack. Don't. Nearly dressed. A white blob catapults over the partition and slides down it. Another blob hits my back. I don't understand. Why? [...] There's jeering "Bum Head," "Bum Head," then a hailstorm of spit and saliva. I can't move. (Gervay 2001:62)

Although the bullies never actually hit Jack, Gervay's novel attempts to illustrate the devastating effect of verbal abuse and persecution on children. The narrative is, nonetheless, an optimistic one that follows Jack's path from victim to victor over not only the bullies, but also his fear, and the discovery and development of Jack's unique talents.

²⁷ The depiction of the role of prefects, the system of fagging and bullying in traditional boys' school stories is discussed in Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3.

2.5 DISCOURSE AND RACISM

The consideration of various forms of control and the exercise of power is closely linked to the discussion of racist discourses. Foucault regards the representation of particular discourses in literature as largely inevitable. This is implicit in his comment that ‘We must dispense with our habit of looking for an author’s authority, and show instead how the power of discourse constrains both the author and his utterances’ (Foucault in Horrocks & Jevtic 1997:4). This suggests, for example, that dominant racist discourses in a particular time and place would shape the way an author thinks and writes about people. Similarly, the current global contestation of previously unchallenged discriminatory discourses of racism would understandably feature in a certain amount of children’s books (there are numerous examples).

The starting point of the study of racism and discourse is that racism manifests and reproduces itself in discourse. ‘Racism is usually defined as a prejudice or stereotypical belief that discriminates against a minority group (however, not necessarily of another race) or a group with less status than the group in power. Therefore, racism is usually associated with classism, ‘ethnicism and xenophobia’ (Renkema 2004:288). Consider, for example, the following excerpt from *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* in which Draco Malfoy publicly insults the Muggle-born witch, Hermione Granger:

The Slytherin team howled with laughter.

“At least no one on the Gryffindor team had to *buy* their way in,” said Hermione sharply. “*They* got in on pure talent.”

The smug look on Malfoy’s face flickered.

“No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood,” he spat.

Harry knew at once that Malfoy had said something really bad because there was an instant uproar at his words. (Rowling 1998:86)

Ron later explains the connotations of the term ‘Mudblood’ as pertaining to so-called “‘Dirty blood, see. Common blood. It’s mad. Most wizards these days are half-blood anyway. If we hadn’t married Muggles we’d have died out” (Rowling

1998:89). Malfoy, the pure-blood descendent of an ancient ‘wizarding family’ (Rowling 1997:61), regards Hermione, whose parents are dentists,²⁸ as his social inferior by ancestral right. His attempt to humiliate Hermione on the grounds of nothing more than what he perceives as her low birth and common parentage is typical of discriminatory racist discourse – the attempt of a socially privileged person to further vindicate his or her own supposed superiority by demeaning the socially marginalised ‘other’. Nevertheless, while Hermione’s remarks relate purely to the questionable inclusion of Malfoy as seeker on the Slytherin team in comparison with the selection criteria for the Gryffindor team, they are also true for the inclusion of Muggle-born witches and wizards into the magical community – they, too, ‘got in on pure talent’ (Rowling 1998:86).

Moreover, in the Harry Potter books it is, paradoxically, Voldemort, the half-blood son of a witch and a Muggle, who displays the greatest contempt for Muggle-born witches and wizards. Perhaps he feels that the extreme, public debasement of Muggle-born persons would align him more clearly with the discourse of pure-blood superiority – and a social class, or ‘noble stock’ (Rowling 2007:586), of which he wishes he were a legitimate member. In the penultimate chapter of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, for example, he sneers at Harry, ‘Love, [...] did not prevent me stamping out your Mudblood mother like a cockroach, Potter...’ (Rowling 2007:592). This kind of bigotry, however, is Rowling’s fantastical depiction of discriminatory discourses which have actual counterparts in real life.

Nevertheless, according to Wodak and Reisigl (2003:373), ‘it is currently an undeniable fact for geneticists and biologists that the concept of “race”, in reference to human beings, has nothing to do with biological reality’. It is merely a social construction that has been used as ‘a legitimating ideological tool to oppress and exploit specific social groups’. Nevertheless, victimised or affected

²⁸ As Hermione naïvely introduces herself: ‘Nobody in my family’s magic at all, it was ever such a surprise when I got my letter, but I was ever so pleased, of course, I mean, it’s the very best school of witchcraft there is, I’ve heard – I’ve learnt all our set books off by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough – I’m Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?’ (Rowling 1997:78).

communities have revolutionised the concept in order to construct an alternative, positive self-identity with which to combat discrimination and fight for increased political autonomy (Wodak & Reisigl 2003:373). For example, according to Magubane (1996:3), a black person who has ‘taken conscience of himself and established a positive identity about himself and his culture comes to see the need for radical change not just in the values and structure of his society, but even more in the way which his colonisation and exploitation are conceptualised’.

Similarly, Hermione Granger (whose supposedly inferior ‘blood status’ comes under particular scrutiny in the final Harry Potter novel) provides a further illustration of this subversion of the dominant discriminatory discourse through her positive self-assessment and her desire for change which she expresses in a conversation with Griphook, the goblin:

“It doesn’t matter,” said Harry, noting Griphook’s rising colour. “This isn’t about wizards versus goblins or any other sort of magical creature – ”

Griphook gave a nasty laugh.

“But it is, it is about precisely that! As the Dark Lord becomes ever more powerful, your race is set more firmly above mine! Gringotts falls under wizarding rule, house-elves are slaughtered, and who amongst the wand-carriers protests?”

“We do!” said Hermione. She had sat up straight, her eyes bright. “We protest! And I’m hunted quite as much as any goblin or elf, Griphook! I’m a Mudblood”

“Don’t call yourself – ” Ron muttered.

“Why shouldn’t I?” said Hermione. “Mudblood, and proud of it! I’ve got no higher position under this new order than you have, Griphook! It was me they chose to torture, back at the Malfoys!” (Rowling 2007:395)

Hermione’s decision to protest against the harsh prejudices of Voldemort’s regime and her refusal to accept or internalise the negative representation of her blood status demonstrate that she has established a positive self-identity despite the belittling connotations generally linked with the term ‘Mudblood’. By contrast, Ron Weasley, a pure-blood wizard with particularly strong Muggle sympathies, who eventually marries²⁹ Hermione, shows evident discomfort at her use of the word ‘Mudblood’ with reference to herself. His response is merely one of denial,

²⁹ Rowling (2007:604).

whereas Hermione's deliberate subversion of the dominant discourse marks the starting point of her personal resistance to the way in which her social status is constructed in the magical world.

From a slightly different perspective, when we are dealing with the issue of racism in literary texts, cognisance should be taken of another, more subtle, form of racism as described in *The Slant of the Pen*, a publication of the World Council of Churches designed to combat racism in children's literature. Jörg Becker describes it as 'the avoidance syndrome' (in Preiswerk 1981:7), which implies that by simply failing to include members of other races in the plot, one is presenting and condoning the values of an elitist and hence prejudiced society.

So, for example, as older boys' school stories invariably featured English boys and presented them as the norm, the usual absence of characters of other races constitutes implicit, albeit subtle, evidence of racist elements. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that the ethno-demographic distribution of Britain was, at the time of publication of these historical texts, not nearly as multi-racial and cosmopolitan as it is today, in which case the books were intended to reflect the general characteristics of the English population.³⁰ This is not, however, the case with a racially and culturally diverse country such as South Africa, in which the Van de Ruit books I discuss in Chapter Six are set.

According to Jenkins (1993:130), early (pre-1976)³¹ South African children's literature, while not entirely excluding or avoiding racial issues, 'simply reflected the status quo and the racial attitudes that predominated among whites at the time'. Nevertheless, the recent process of political reform has enabled the production of an increasing number of books that deal with this theme as a result

³⁰ Due to the almost exclusively British nature of historical boys' school stories, some limited forms of xenophobia sometimes filter through the texts. However, as none of the historical texts examined in this study deal with this discourse to any notable degree, xenophobia is not discussed in detail.

³¹ According to Jenkins (1993:130), '[t]he children's uprising of 1976 marked the liberation of South African children's books from a taboo on matters of race and politics'.

of 'greater tolerance of what may be published and children may read' (Jenkins 1993:130).

Despite this increased freedom, however, the majority of post-1976 novels that deal with race relations 'do not employ black protagonists to give an Afrocentric perspective. The central characters are white, and the books are clearly intended for white readers who will identify with them' (Jenkins 1993:134). However, in most cases, the authors use this perspective as a means of representing to the reader the potentially new and probably unfamiliar experiences made possible by relationships with members of different racial groups.

The South African transition to democracy and the subsequent 'building of a rainbow nation' has, nevertheless, had an (inevitable) effect on children's literature and more recent publications have displayed a growing tendency to present protagonists from racially and culturally diverse socio-political backgrounds. According to the South African Children's Literature Website (2009), award-winning books such as Jenny Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000), Lütz van Dijk's *Stronger Than the Storm* (2001), Peter Slingsby's *Jedro's Bane* (2002) and Reviva Schermbrucker's *Am I a Lion that Eats People?* (2004) are just a few of many recent English young adult novels that attempt to present experiences from an Afrocentric point of view. By contrast, although the Spud novels by John van de Ruit (which are discussed in Chapter Six of this study) are very recent publications, they present the South African school experience from a white protagonist's perspective.

In his comprehensive study *National Character in South African English Children's Literature*, Jenkins (2006:xii) notes that critical studies of young adult fiction focused primarily on the political content from the 1970s onward, 'during the last years of apartheid and the country's transition to democracy'. Nevertheless, as traditional historical boys' school stories rarely raise the issue of race, I do not discuss racial discourses in great detail in subsequent chapters.

2.6 GENDER DISCOURSES

In her study, *The Widening World of Children's Literature*, Ang (2000:51) points out that 'a picture of social control emerges from children's literature where social classes each have a clearly marked-out place'. Hence, it seems inevitable that school stories would represent various aspects of social control. Ang (2000:51) makes the further claim that another form of social control is implicit in the 'categorisation of "boys' fiction" and "girls' fiction" during the nineteenth century' which effectively split the body of children's literature into sections, 'each catering for a separate class of persons, who were by implication barred and excluded from the other classes of fiction'.

Thus, the rudimentary classification of, for example, boys' school stories in itself constitutes the implementation of a gendered discourse which excludes not only certain girl readers,³² but also, to a large extent, the representation of female main characters in the narratives.³³ This is particularly true of historical boys' school fiction – recent publications of a similar genre (and particularly those discussed in Chapters Four to Six of this study), however, include female characters in relatively conspicuous roles.

Although the inclusion of female characters in the narrative indicates a distinct shift in the dominant discourses of gender which filter through the texts, it is the manner in which these girls and women are represented in these contemporary texts that is of particular interest. For example, in traditional boys' school stories, mothers and sisters (if they are mentioned at all) are generally portrayed as the angelic, loyal and trusting keepers of the home. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, for example, we read that 'the thought of his own mother came across [to fourteen

³² I know from personal experience that some girls enjoy reading books that are clearly intended for boys.

³³ In traditional boys' school stories, women simply do not appear, except when they feature on the outer periphery of the narrative in minor (frequently subservient) roles such as housekeeper, matron, cook, and absent mother or sister. At times, the references are even distinctly derogatory and patronising: 'On the whole, the long-suffering boys' maids, as they were called, did their work very well. As a rule, it should be added, they were middle-aged women, not remarkable for beauty' (Nevill 1911:308).

year-old Tom], and the promise he had made at her knee, years ago, never to forget to kneel by his bedside, and give himself up to his Father' (Hughes [1857] 1971:177). This image of a virtuous, caring mother whom one would be loath to disappoint is quite common in stories of this genre. By way of a startling contrast, however, consider the following extract from *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 ¾*, dated March 29th – Mothering Sunday:

My father gave me three pounds last night. He said, "Get your mother something decent, son, it could be the last time." I certainly wasn't going all the way into town for her, so I went to Mr Cherry's and bought a box of Black Magic, and a card saying "To a wonderful mother".

Card manufacturers must think that all mothers are wonderful because every single card has "wonderful" written on it somewhere. I felt like crossing "wonderful" out and putting "wanton" in its place, but I didn't. I signed it "from your son, Adrian". I gave it to her this morning. She said, "Adrian, you shouldn't have." She was right, I shouldn't have. (Townsend 1982:65)

In this excerpt, Adrian challenges the sweeping generalisations, made by card manufacturers, which are based on the dominant (and conveniently commercialised) discourse that depicts mothers as the gentle, loving and stable primary care-givers of the family unit, regardless of whether this, in fact, constitutes a true reflection of modern motherhood. Although he feels justified by the logic in his argument, Adrian nevertheless conforms to the dictates of the dominant discourse by not replacing 'wonderful' with 'wanton', however bitter his thoughts toward his mother may be, and in so doing, he fulfils his (admittedly minor) role in perpetuating the existence of the dominant discursive structure.

While Adrian Mole's mother (who, according to her hygiene-obsessed son, also fails abysmally at managing the household cleaning³⁴) is represented in a particularly promiscuous light, some contemporary representations of women are

³⁴ Adrian observes (Townsend 1984:17):

My mother and my father are always arguing about their bedroom. My father's side of the room is dead neat, but my mother's side is disgusting: overflowing ashtrays, old yellow *Observers*, books, magazines and puddles of nylon knickers on the floor. *Her* bedside shelves are full of yukky junk she buys from second-hand shops, one-armed statues, broken vases and stinking old books etc. I pity my father for having to share a room with her. All *he's* got on his shelves are his AA book and a photograph of my mother in her wedding dress. She's the only bride I've seen who's got cigarette smoke coming out of her nostrils.

clearly still informed by the – arguably dated – discourse that constructs mothers as the conscientious custodians of the home who invest all their energies in family affairs. Take, for example, the distinctly conventional representation of Mrs Weasley in the Harry Potter novels. This short, plump, kind-faced mother of seven does not follow a career of her own, but rather, uses her (enviable) magical powers to assist her with domestic chores: ‘She flicked her wand casually at the washing-up in the sink, which began to clean itself, clinking gently in the background’ (Rowling 1998:31). The ‘flowered apron with a wand sticking out of the pocket’ (Rowling 1998:30) adds the finishing touch to complete the image of comfortable, magical domesticity.

Nevertheless, as implied by the title of this study, issues of female representation are not of primary interest here. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, gender discourse studies have (until recently) displayed a tendency to neglect equally relevant issues of male representation. As Jack Balswick (1992:13) comments in *Men at the Crossroads*:

In reality, women and men’s roles are two sides of the same coin; one can’t be defined without the other. Each is defined by its opposite – and it is impossible to redefine one role without redefining the other. But in fact, this is exactly what our society has attempted to do since the beginning of the women’s movement.

Although I consider Balswick’s claim that each ‘is defined by its opposite’ slightly problematic in that the definition of gender roles is, in my opinion, not merely a matter of dichotomy between the sexes, I agree with his assertion that a redefinition of one role certainly warrants, if not a redefinition, a reassessment, at least, of the other.³⁵ I examine the historically prevalent constructions and

³⁵ In her recent British schoolgirl publication called *My So-Called Life: The Tragically Normal Diary of Rachel Riley*, Joanna Nadin takes great pains to reflect the shifts in gender discourses not only in her representation of Rachel, but also of Rachel’s ‘hobbit-obsessed’, rather precocious, new-age younger brother, James, who is ‘on a fast in religious sympathy with Islam’ – which in itself represents a shift in religious discourses (Nadin 2007:233; my emphases):

Thursday 6

James’s Ramadan fast has ended. He went dizzy *during netball (non-sexist sports coaching)* and had to be force-fed chocolate milk to revive him. He is going to pray to Mecca five times a day instead. I asked where hobbits featured in Islam’s teachings. He said this was typical of such a small-minded Westerner and that Islam was not the exclusive, extremist religion it was cracked up to be.

representations of boyhood in boys' school stories and juxtapose these with recent texts of the same genre in order to identify consistent or contrasting discourses in this context.

2.7 CONCLUSION

It is evident from the various definitions presented in this chapter that the concept of discourse is particularly useful in the analysis of the discursive structures that function in educational institutions in general (and in exclusive boys' boarding schools in particular), as well as texts in which such institutions appear. More specifically, Foucault's definition ([1972] 2003:80) of discourse as 'a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements', presents a theoretical framework whereby recurrent and characteristic elements of school stories can be analysed in terms of the 'regulations' imposed on the texts by dominant discourses. Thus, as illustrated earlier in this chapter, the emphasis is not so much on the utterances or texts themselves, but rather on the rules and structures that produce them.

Furthermore, the idea of discourse as the underlying framework that operates within a social context, which is determined by that social context, and which also contributes to the way that social context continues its existence (Mills 2004:10), is particularly applicable to the relatively isolated social context of the school as a microcosm. Hence, the institutional nature of school plays a vital role in the development, maintenance and circulation of the discourses it embraces.

Moreover, the maintenance of dominant discourses is inextricably linked to the concept of power and control. According to Noomé (2006:121), control often involves 'the "normalisation" of the discourse', which, in the case of this study, would be the schoolboy ethic. This 'normalisation', refers to 'the distribution of individuals around a norm' which is necessary for the 'government of life-

Friday 7

James's praying to Mecca has ended. He says it interferes with CBBC too much. Plus the dog got overexcited and chewed his prayer mat (an M&S beach towel).

processes' (Coetzee 2003:18). Conformation to (or dissension from) the guiding principles of the defining discourses which collectively constitute the schoolboy ethic thus forms an essential aspect of the construction and representation of boyhood. As C.S. Lewis ([1955] 1991:80) reasons, 'a boy goes to a Public School precisely to be made a *normal*, sensible boy – a good mixer – to be taken out of himself; and eccentricity is severely penalised'³⁶ (my emphasis).

The circulation of dominant discourses in the school context, moreover, is manifested not only in the transfer of discursive codes from one generation of schoolboys to the next, but also in the literary texts which re-enact, on a fictional level, the values, principles and moral codes approved by the institutions these texts purportedly represent. In view of this assertion, Locke's (2004:2) suggestion that texts themselves form 'ideal sites for both the inculcation and the contestation of discourses' is of particular value. Moreover, his claim that the systematic analysis of texts may be 'potentially revelatory of ways in which discourses consolidate power and colonise human subjects' (Locke 2004:2) is decidedly valid in the case of school fiction.

Furthermore, the exploration of fictional representations of boyhood as the period during which certain experiences, ideologies and modes of being contribute to the colonisation of the boy protagonist by various discourses (as noted in Section 1.2) is thus made possible by the principles of critical discourse analysis. Locke's assertions also facilitate an analysis of the ways in which the discourses surrounding school life – through interactions with teachers and peers, for example – affect the fictional representations of 'boyhood' in the school context, as well as the ways in which these representations have changed or remained unaltered with the passage of time.

³⁶ Elsewhere, C.S. Lewis ([1955] 1991:104) cynically remarks, 'It was, of course, to turn us into public-school boys that my father had originally sent us to Wyvern; the finished product appalled him'.

In view of these considerations, Chapter Three, by means of an issues-based discussion, investigates the dominant characteristics and recurrent motifs of historical boy's school stories in order to identify the 'discursive substratum' (Locke 2004:89) beneath the surface of the narratives. In so doing, the dominant discourses that inform and control the particular representations and constructions of boyhood made possible by the context of boys' public schools can be identified and discussed in the context of contemporary masculinity studies.

CHAPTER THREE

DOMINANT DISCOURSES AND FORMULAIC ELEMENTS IN HISTORICAL BOYS' SCHOOL STORIES

*How dear the schoolboy spot,
We ne'er forget, though there we are forgot.*
(M., I.E. 1846:89)

*Public schools, those places where the finest men were prepared for
the best positions in life...*
(Bristow 1991:82)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

My first encounter with historical boys' public school stories was particularly apt. Closeted in a small anteroom in the Sammy Marks Museum, surrounded by elaborate, priceless antiques and relics of a bygone era, I gently opened the cover of *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's* by Talbot Baines Reed (1887 edition) and turned the delicate, yellowed pages with a white-gloved hand.³⁷ With the lingering smell of mould to permeate my reading experience, I was drawn into the fascinating world of boys' public schools; a world then still largely unfamiliar to me, peopled by an assortment of masters, prefects, boy heroes, bullies and fags whose intra- and interpersonal interactions constitute the essential fibre of the narrative.

From the first, I was struck by the absolute and unqualified confidence, the overwhelming self-assuredness of the author as he explains, with remarkable fervour, the intricacies of schoolboy honour, integrity and courage. I encountered modes of thought and behaviour that seemed foreign and even, in some

³⁷ My research formed part of a greater project initiated by the Department of English at the University of Pretoria to investigate the historical texts contained in the virtually pristine collection of about 300 children's books at the Sammy Marks Museum. To preserve them, the books, dating from 1850 to the early 1920s, many first or only editions, may be handled only if one wears cotton gloves.

instances, wrong to me, but which Reed represents as the epitome of boyhood consciousness. The fagging system, cruel canings and the particularly violent nature of fights between boys were just some of the issues that left me quite bewildered. Consequently, I set about the task of trying to understand the discourses that informed the opinions and practices so boldly propagated in texts of this genre for the purpose of definition and comparison, or, as suggested in the previous chapter, to investigate through such texts the ways in which the public school system colonised its human subjects.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault ([1972] 2003:46) observes:

Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements; the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth: the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

In the context of the microcosm of the boys’ public school, Foucault’s observations are particularly applicable. The ‘regime of truth’, which one may also refer to as the school ethos, and which pervades every aspect of the narrative, determines the nature of the discourses which function ‘as true’ in this microcosm.

These salient discourses, in turn, determine the nature of the recurrent motifs or formulaic elements and practices which feature in the boys’ public school story, and their inclusion in, or exclusion from, such stories in a context which may potentially preserve, silence or alter such discourses. Moreover, an analysis of these discourses facilitates an understanding of the representation of the particular constructions of boyhood typical of traditional boys’ school stories.

This chapter, therefore, presents an overview of the dominant discourses expressed in a selection of traditional boys’ schools stories (see Section 3.2) and their portrayal in similar works. In order to identify these discourses, the respective treatments of selected recurrent motifs and elements of the genre that

could be described as formulaic are explored. Examples of creative works of fiction that challenge these dominant discourses are also discussed, as well as the emergent or alternative discursive frameworks they present.

3.1.1 The schools behind the stories

'School stories are a product of their time' (Smith 1996:345) and thus, in order to interpret boys' school stories in their socio-historical context, it is useful to consider the actual institutions they purportedly represent. The period of popularity and prominence of boys' public schools spans approximately a century, from about the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. As I noted in Section 1.2, public schools existed before this period and continue to exist, but they were essentially different in character and function, in atmosphere and methods and in ideas and motives during those hundred years (Quigly 1982:1). In essence, the public school has today, by all accounts, lost its legendary 'eccentricity and particularity, its ferocious influence, its emotional importance, its denseness and isolation from the rest of the world, its consequent power for good or ill' (Quigly 1982:1). In the hundred years after 1850, the 'ferocious influence' of British boys' public schools in their heyday spread across the Empire, affecting the discursive structures and practices of educational institutions across the globe in places where the system was commended by representative publications or loyal public school alumni.

Smith (1996:344) comments that, while the idea of sending one's children away from home at a relatively early age to large boarding schools may seem 'unnatural or even bizarre' to some people today, Victorian and Edwardian families generally accepted this as a normal part of growing up in middle and upper class Britain. Furthermore, she points out that attendance at a reputable public school was regarded as a necessary measure to maintain or even advance one's social status (Smith 1996:344):

Children of rich families went to boarding schools, and less-wealthy families sent their children to school in an attempt to make a social statement in a world dominated by a social hierarchy. The more prestigious the school, the better it

looked on one's social résumé. Schools were viewed as places to make important social connections, not just places to learn math or Latin.

Quigly (1982:2) claims that at the peak of the popularity of these types of school, attendance at exclusive boys' public schools was not simply an indication of the type of education one had received, but it also constituted, for schoolboys and 'old boys' alike, a tacit synopsis of 'a person's sense of the kind of man he is, the kind of background he has or admits to, the niche he expects to occupy in the world or would like his children to have'; in short, a constructed discourse about such schools and their alumni. In 1939, George Orwell (1939:4) claimed that

[i]n England education is mainly a matter of status. The most definite dividing line between the petit-bourgeoisie and the working class is that the former pay for their education, and within the bourgeoisie there is another unbridgeable gulf between the "public" school and the "private" school. It is quite clear that there are tens and scores of thousands of people to whom every detail of life at a "posh" public school is wildly thrilling and romantic. They happen to be outside that mystic world of quadrangles and house-colours, but they yearn after it, daydream about it, live in it mentally for hours at a stretch.

Similarly, D.W. Brogan (cited in Kiberd 2004:57) asserts that, 'being a schoolboy [in England] is an end in itself', while Robin Maigham (cited in Quigly 1982:15) expresses his belief that

Eton was a way of life. For, in a sense, Etonians never left Eton; they merely changed into being Old Etonians ... It was a club where your standing depended not on what you were doing in your life but on what you had done in your years as a boy at Eton. By that behaviour and by that reputation, rather than by any subsequent success or failure, you were judged.

In one of the sermons which he preached while headmaster of Marlborough College, Dean Farrar (1876:15) justifies this notion whilst encouraging the boys to behave in a principled and circumspect manner:

And first I would ask. Do any of you regard your boyhood, with its subjection to parents and masters, and its general state of discipline and tutelage, as "that which is least?" Do you yearn for the greater day, as perhaps you think it, when you shall be free to choose in life your own path and your own pursuits, none hindering you? Well, to you I say solemnly, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." What you are now the chances are that, in the main, you will be hereafter. The boy is father to the man. Be false and treacherous, be unjust or impure, be

indolent and disobedient now, and you will either be saved so as by fire, or you will grow up into a useless dangerous, degraded man. And, on the other hand, be good and faithful, be pure and honest, be brave and generous now, and then be very sure that God will make you a worthy son of the school that trained, a worthy citizen of the nation that nurtured you; nay more, a true child of God, a certain inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

C. Day-Lewis (cited in Quigly 1982:15) describes schooling as ‘the subsoil of adult life’, or the ‘invisible compost’ that feeds adult emotions of all kinds; hence, the feelings of nostalgia, interest, love, hatred and antagonism aroused by typical public schools in their heyday are arguably unequalled anywhere else. It would seem, according to various contemporary autobiographical accounts, that some of these assertions still hold true for some traditional boys’ public schools and their imitators today. The *Guardian Unlimited* recently published extracts from Tobias Hill’s diary entries, written when he was invited to experience Eton first-hand as poet-in-residence in 2007. A telling passage appears under the section dated 5 March (Hill 2007:4):

It is a costume drama out there. There is a vulnerability to them all, boys and beaks both. They teeter on the ridiculous. If Eton were any more self-conscious the whole edifice would begin to fall apart. And how can it not be self-conscious, when so many eyes are upon it?

Not for the first time, it comes to me that it is an extraordinary experience to be here. Even a prince would feel it (and they are princes, some of these boys). It isn’t the beauty of it, or the wealth – those are things the boys may well find elsewhere. It is the *gateless otherness*. I wonder if that is what will come back to haunt them, even those who live out their lives in palaces. How long will they carry out the invisible imperative, “Don’t cross the bridge”?³⁸

It must be very easy to love or hate. There was an article put up in one classroom, written by an old-schoolboy-turned-celebrity, who had evidently loathed Eton all his life. I thought it was put here for the boys to hate in turn, but that assumes that Eton is something they love, or that their love could be so uncomplicated as to preclude hatreds of its own.

Hill’s reference to ‘gateless otherness’ certainly seems to signify a distinct – and staunchly traditional – isolation from the outside world, as well as a degree of the eccentricity referred to by Quigly (1982:1) above. Moreover, the ‘emotional

³⁸ The bridge marks the border of the school precincts and thus symbolises the definitive isolation, literal and metaphorical, of the school from the town.

importance' of the school³⁹ and the school experience is emphasised by Hill's contemplation of the kinds of love experienced by contemporary Etonians in this regard. The last paragraph hints at a discourse of school loyalty dominant in the microcosm of the school and ties in with an entrenched and powerful ethos, a loyalty so deep-rooted as to have inspired the Old-Etonian poet John Moultrie (cited in Nevill 1911:6) to reflect:

And through thy [Eton's] spacious courts, and o'er thy green
Irriguous meadows, swarming as of old,
A youthful generation still is seen,
Of birth, of mind, of humour manifold:
The grave, the gay, the timid, and the bold,
The noble nursling of the palace hall,
The merchant's offspring, heir to wealth untold,
The pale-eyed youth, whom learning's spells enthrall,
Within thy cloisters meet, and love thee, one and all.

3.1.2 The boys' public school ethos

The Victorian boys' public school curriculum concerned itself mainly with instruction in the venerated ancient languages, Latin and Greek, with a smattering of Mathematics and negligible attention to the modern languages. According to Dr Arnold of Rugby, the study of language “seems to me as if it was given for the very purpose of forming the human mind in youth; and the Greek and Latin languages seem the very instruments by which this is to be effected” (Strachey [1918] 1981:170). In the context of boys' public schools, the study of ancient languages may be interpreted as forming part of an archaic discourse, that is, a discourse ‘which is wholly recognised as an element of the *past*, to be *observed*, to be *examined*, or even on occasion to be “*revived*”, in a deliberately specializing way’ (Williams 1977:122; my emphases).

³⁹ According to an (understandably biased) Old Etonian, Ralph Nevill (1911:2), the ‘affection felt for the school [Eton] is the greatest justification for its existence; an educational institution which can inspire those sent there with a profound and lasting pride and belief in its superiority over all other schools, must of necessity possess some special and fine qualities not to be found elsewhere.’

Nevertheless, according to Kiberd (2004:57), boys' public schools did not only endeavour to *teach* epic creations of classical literature; these institutions *became*, in their own way, versions of the epic world, a locus for strange customs and unqualified taboos which often required flamboyant displays of courage and assertiveness. In this sense it would seem that the archaic discourses of classical literature had been so effectively 'revived' that they became 'active in the cultural process' (Williams 1977:122, Williams's emphasis) of the public school as effective elements of the present – a distinction which would identify such discourses as residual.

In his historical survey of Victorian public schools, John Honey (1977:147) claims that the phenomenon embodied in the ethos of the public schools is perhaps unique in modern history. That is, 'the completeness of the transfer to an alternative community – a distinctive emotional milieu, capable of generating its own set of values – as the common practice of an influential section of society, probably has no parallel in advanced societies' (Honey 1977:147). The relative isolation of the public school was thus conducive to the generation and perpetuation of very specific discursive structures which collectively defined boys' public school culture.

Webb (2006:76) draws attention to the fact that the circumstances and setting of the public school presented the 'ideal microcosm for the dissemination of [imperial] values and attitudes'. Kiberd (2004:57) comments:

The highest ideals of traditional English culture – fair play, not peaching on a fellow, giving everyone a chance, *self-discipline imposed more from within than without* under a leadership too subtle to actually say what the implicit rules are – all these were epitomised by the schools, which became not just institutions for the transmission of those values, but imagined communities in which those values could be put to the test by the young. (my emphasis)

Kiberd's reference (2004:57) to the kind of self-discipline that is 'imposed more from within than without' illustrates the complete internalisation of discourses in the colonised subject. Moreover, the issues surrounding the transmission of values within an institution bring to mind the role of discourse as a resultant, but

also determining force⁴⁰ within boys' public schools. As Foucault ([1972] 2003:133) says:

Each element [of a discourse] considered is taken as the expression of the totality to which it belongs and whose limits it exceeds. And in this way one substitutes for the diversity of things said a sort of great, uniform text, which has never before been articulated, and which reveals for the first time what men "really meant" not only in their words and texts, their discourses and their writings, but also in the institutions, practices, techniques and objects that they produced.

In an attempt to discover what was 'really meant' by the public school system in its prime, it is useful to investigate why these institutions ever came into existence.

It has been argued that adult life as an imperial functionary demanded just the type of preparation that boys' public schools provided (Quigly 1982:5). Countless British professionals⁴¹ who travelled internationally as civil engineers, businessmen and administrators were required to spend months, if not years, away from all familiar persons and places. According to Quigly (1982:5), a boy with ten years of training could face circumstances that would daunt the uninitiated: loneliness, isolation, difficult living conditions and removal from family, friends, culture and country. The generally accepted argument claimed that, if at the tender age of eight, such removal was thrust upon the public schoolboy, at eighteen, he would certainly consider it normal. In other words, just as public school posed the opposite of home in childhood, so a typical life in service of the Empire stood in contrast to ordinary adult existence (Quigly 1982:7).

Ironically, the abnormality of life for those who *manned* the Empire – an existence characterised by constant travel and upheaval – caused the public school to become the unchanging constant for the great majority of its alumni. Its

⁴⁰ As discussed in Section 2.2.

⁴¹ In *Memoirs of Eminent Etonians*, Creasy (1850:504) claims (rather hyperbolically, it should be said) that 'living Etonians are eminent in every rank of life, in every profession, in every department of literature and science'.

apparent permanence made it the unmoving pivot in a shifting world, a sort of common ground in a literal, as well as a metaphorical, sense: it assumed a kind of ancestral importance (Quigly 1982:6). As Ralph Nevill (1911:3), for example, says of Eton, 'for the true Etonian there is no such thing as a final parting from these surroundings, the indefinable charm of which remains in his mind up to the last day of his life'. Alec Waugh (cited in Quigly 1982:7) even wrote of the typical English schoolboy that his 'religion,⁴² if he has one, is an unswerving loyalty to his house and school'.

These highly influential institutions also became the locus for the reinforcement and circulation of imperial discourses. When confidence in British imperialism was high, and 'a particular kind of training was required to produce a particular kind of man', the public school became a functional powerhouse. When this confidence waned, the training it gave, as well as the men it produced, seemed, quite suddenly, irrelevant to the world (Quigly 1982:1). While it lasted, however, the school ethos was strong, and it was propagated via popular school stories to colonise the minds of even those who did not attend such exclusive schools.

3.2 HISTORICAL BOYS' SCHOOL STORIES

In *The Heirs of Tom Brown*, Quigly (1982:43) notes that the public school 'turned out to be a remarkably convenient setting for fiction. [...] It was an enclosed community, self-contained, self-sufficient, concentrated, dramatic. [...] Isolated communities have always attracted novelists,⁴³ and in its isolation the public

⁴² In a similar vein, Nevill (1911:2) asserts that '[n]o other school exercises such an attraction over its old boys as Eton, with many of whom the traditions of the place become almost a second religion.'

⁴³ It is, of course, possible that certain publications should contain erroneous representations of public school life. In the foreword to his engaging book entitled *A Day of My Life; or, Everyday Experiences at Eton, By an Eton Boy*, Banks (1877:iv) comments: 'I have undertaken this work because I am constantly coming across books written by people who appear to know nothing about Eton, and I want to give the world some idea of what an ordinary Etonian thinks of Eton life, and how he really does get on.'

school was comparable only with prison⁴⁴ or monastery'. Furthermore, the predictable routine of lessons, games and 'prep', accompanied by the customary behaviour of prefects and masters, forms a familiar, stable background for the narratives.⁴⁵

3.2.1 *Tom Brown's Schooldays*: the pioneer and benchmark publication

When *Tom Brown's Schooldays*⁴⁶ by Thomas Hughes was published in 1857, it experienced an unprecedented level of success: it was reprinted in five separate editions in that year alone (Musgrave 1985:61). In its review, *The Times*⁴⁷ wrote, 'We hail this little work as the truest, liveliest and most sympathetic description of a unique phase of English life that has yet been given to the public' (Musgrave 1985:62).

According to Bristow (1991:53), Hughes's novel is significant because it is the first school story that promotes the value of education away from home. By representing 'a new variety of morally responsible and physically strong manliness, Hughes's novel was attempting to raise a longstanding tradition of disreputable tales of unruly schoolboys up to an acceptable level' (Bristow 1991:54).

The early chapters of the book depict Tom happily situated within his family home in the Berkshire countryside. When Tom departs for Rugby (of Arnoldian

⁴⁴ In his keynote paper 'Theorising the Diary of Iris Vaughan', Alexander (2005) explores the similarities between the discourses controlling imprisonment and the silencing and control of children with special reference to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977).

⁴⁵ C.S. Lewis's autobiographical work, *Surprised by Joy*, first published in 1955, contains several sections that are relevant to this study. Its particular value lies in the fact that Lewis's description of life in a boys' public school is apparently true and therefore useful for comparison with the fictional accounts presented in boys' school stories.

⁴⁶ *Tom Brown's Schooldays* was by no means the very first novel to place the boy in the context of school. However, critics generally agree that, with this publication, Thomas Hughes 'founded a new genre' (Quigly 1982:42). The appearance of Farrar's *Eric* in the following year established the genre, and helped to create a large readership amongst boys. The genre remained popular until shortly before the Second World War, whereafter, according to Smith (1996:344), it dissipated.

⁴⁷ *The Times* (1857) was convinced that *Tom Brown's Schooldays* was 'the first book for boys, about boys in which the characters were really a collection of human beings, all alive and all different, at a genuine school' (Musgrave 1985:62).

fame), the tale becomes a *Bildungsroman* of sorts in which Tom's subsequent moral development is described. The shift places Tom, a carefree individualist of the upper middle class, in a public school where he is required to cultivate a sense of duty and responsibility, team spirit and classical stoicism. During his years at Rugby, he also learns 'how to win with honour and humility, and how to lose with courage, including the courage to deal with the death of a friend' (Webb 2006:76). The influence of the headmaster, Thomas Arnold, is instrumental in Tom's growth. John Baxendale (cited in Bristow 1991:59) summarises Thomas Arnold's views concerning the ideal Victorian schoolboy as follows:

The Arnoldian ideal of the Christian gentleman was no mere putting together of middle-class moral earnestness with gentry style: it was a new synthesis in which neither hereditary right nor competitive individualism guaranteed fitness to rule. Character training along Christian lines, the mental rigours of the classics, and the inculcation of the collective spirit, [...] represented in their time a decisive shift towards meritocracy in the selection and training of future rulers.

It is evident from the summary of the story that several aspects of the narrative coincide with the salient features of the *Bildungsroman* as it is described by Hader (1996:1), who views it as

... most generally, the story of a single individual's growth and development within the context of a defined social order. The growth process, at its root a quest story, has been described as both "an apprenticeship to life" and a "search for meaningful existence within society". [...] The process of maturity is long, arduous, and gradual, consisting of repeated clashes between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgements enforced by an unbending social order. [...] Eventually, the spirit and values of the social order become manifest in the protagonist, who is then accommodated into society. The novel ends with an assessment by the protagonist of himself in his new place in that society.

Tom Brown's Schooldays corresponds almost point by point with this definition. Hence, Tom Brown's tale is, in essence, a portrayal of his gradual acceptance into the public schoolboy fraternity and, by extension, the society that holds up the British public schoolboy as an ideal – an acceptance which is entirely dependent on his ability (and willingness) to absorb and internalise the dominant discourses that collectively constitute the school ethos. Tom's success at Rugby is due partly to the eagerness he displays in trying to identify and comprehend 'the spirit and values of the social order' in which he finds himself. For example,

on his very first day of public school – before he even enters the gates of Rugby – Tom begins to imitate the behaviour and attitude of his new friend, Harry East, who has the advantage over Tom of one half year at the school:

There's nothing for candour like a lower-school boy, and East was a genuine specimen – frank, hearty, and good-natured, well satisfied with himself and his position, and chock full of life and spirits, and all the Rugby prejudices and traditions which he had been able to get together, in the long course of one half year, during which he had been at the School-house. And Tom, notwithstanding his bumptiousness, felt friends with him at once, and began sucking in all his ways and prejudices, as fast as he could understand them. (Hughes [1857] 1971:79)

This excerpt constitutes, I would suggest, a prime example of one of the ways in which dominant public school discourses are perpetuated from within the peer group by means of intentional (as well as subconscious) emulation.

According to Bristow (1991:60), *Tom Brown's Schooldays* presented itself as 'something of a prospectus for Arnold's Rugby when it first appeared. It made a point of explaining the principles governing Arnold's most important innovation: the hierarchy of praeposters, whereby older boys were entrusted with the care of younger ones'. Moreover, he points out that the novel was of interest not only to boy readers, but also to parents intending to send their children away from home to be educated. Indeed, considering the amount of detailed information⁴⁸ included in the book, it is evident that Hughes was addressing an audience with only a limited knowledge of the conventions of public school life (Bristow 1991:61).

The fact that the book deals with some real characters in an actual location – Rugby during Thomas Arnold's career as headmaster (1828-1842) – is significant in that Thomas Hughes himself attended the school during this period. A work of this nature is, therefore, well qualified to present (consciously or unwittingly) an insider's (admittedly subjective) construction of the practices and

⁴⁸ In order to enlighten the apparent ignorance of his audience, Hughes ([1857]1971:85) supplies many detailed definitions throughout the book such as the following: 'The punt-about is a practice ball, which is brought out and kicked about anyhow from one boy to another before callings-over and dinner, and at other odd times.'

traditions of a closed community such as the public school. Hence, the dominant discourses in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* may be seen to be a near true reflection of the dominant discursive structures in typical public schools that moulded their ethos on Arnoldian principles, and in *Tom Brown* alternative discourses are largely marginalised, if not silenced completely. Moral problems are resolved by resorting to the discourses of 'public school truth' and adhering to the unspoken rules by which they are governed.

Thus, the themes, ideologies and discourses evident in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the acknowledged pioneer of British boys' school stories, may be regarded as a benchmark against which all subsequent works of the same genre may be analysed. We see the discourses discussed in this chapter first formalised in this book. The key motifs and discourses are discussed in detail in Section 3.3.

3.2.2 Other historical boys' school stories cited in this study

Although Frederic William Farrar's *Eric, or Little by Little* (1858) was published just one year after Hughes's pioneering novel, it did not enjoy the same amount of popularity because of its significantly more sombre, self-righteous tone. The novel, nevertheless, contains particularly useful allusions to acceptable schoolboy philosophies and behaviour.

The Fifth Form at St Dominic's (1881) by Thomas Baines Reed is described by Smith (1996:345) as 'one of the early classics of the [boys' school story] genre'. Furthermore, Quigly (1982:83) claims that key ingredients of *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* – involving the stolen exam paper, the innocent wrongly accused and other remarkable reversals of fate – 'are shaped by a philosophy of Christian manliness that has its origins in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*'. Thus, in terms of the identification of recurrent motifs in boys' school literature, this text is invaluable.

Bristow (1991:53) goes so far as to say that Reed ‘perfected the public school story as a genre’ in *The Fifth Form at St Dominic’s*. The following review from *The Scotsman* was printed on the back flap of the 1887⁴⁹ edition:

No more spirited stories of school life have been penned than those of Talbot Baines Reed. He has had, indeed, many clever successors, but no superior – many would say no equal – in this particular field of literature.

One of his ‘clever successors’ would certainly have to be John Finnemore. The wit and charm of his style and the inherent vitality of his characters make the *Teddy Lester* series a highly entertaining and rewarding read. Moreover, the motifs and formulaic elements found in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* are persistently repeated throughout the books. *For the Sake of his Chum*, an example of the genre, by the considerably more obscure Walter C. Rhoades (1909), also follows the trend set by Hughes’s novel, though in a less jovial and accessible manner than that employed in Finnemore’s books.

While the books by Farrar, Reed, Rhoades and Finnemore underpin the dominant discourses propounded in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, there are also texts that challenge the *status quo* by advocating, or at least intimating the possible existence of alternative discourses in boys’ school stories.

Mobsley’s Mohicans (1909), a boys’ school story by Harold Avery, also features as a primary text in this chapter. In *The Oxford Companion to Children’s Literature*, Carpenter and Prichard (1995:39) claim that the school stories of Harold Avery ‘resemble those of Talbot Baines Reed’. Nevertheless, although many of the traditional aspects of boys’ school stories make their appearance in the novel, Avery consciously subverts the dominant discourses of the established school story formula and approaches familiar issues in a unique and innovative way. His work is thus valuable as a non-conformist text.

⁴⁹ Four of the primary texts used in this study are historical editions preserved in the Sammy Marks Museum in Pretoria, three of them first editions. These are

- *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic’s* (first published in 1881), 1887 edition by Talbot Baines Reed;
- *Mobsley’s Mohicans* (1909) by Harold Avery;
- *For the Sake of His Chum* (1909) by Walter C. Rhoades; and
- *Teddy Lester’s Chums* (1910) by John Finnemore.

Bristow (1991:74) refers to *Stalky & Co.* (1899) as 'Kipling's scurrilous public-school story'. Indeed, Kipling's treatment of several conventional aspects of boys' school stories is clearly subversive and thought-provoking, thus presenting an essentially alternative or emergent discursive structure. Nevertheless, despite (or perhaps because of) its dissident approach, the novel is regarded as a classic in the boys' school story genre, and thus constitutes an essential primary text for the purposes of this study.

The Billy Bunter stories by Frank Richards that appeared in the boys' weeklies published between 1908 and 1940 in the *Magnet* contributed significantly to the popularisation of the boys' school story genre. Because of the publication's extensive distribution network (covering most of the British Empire at times), boys' public school lore spread far and wide. Towards the end of this chapter, I examine representative Billy Bunter publications in relation to traditional boys' school stories and the discourses which filter through the texts. At first glance the books seem to subvert the dominant discourses of the genre with essentially alternative depictions of Billy and his reprehensible behaviour. Closer observation suggests, however, that through the unconventional portrayal of the protagonist, Richards uses satire to simultaneously subvert and support the dominant discourses of boys' school stories.

3.2.3 The school story as moral tale: didacticism in the texts

According to Lukens (1995:191), 'didacticism or preaching is expected of sermons that point to moral lessons and teaching from textbooks that spread before us the truths of concept or fact'. She claims, however, that true literature *does not preach*, and yet adults frequently choose stories for children that force a moral upon them because they think that a story is good only if it contains obvious lessons. The question whether children's literature should or should not be didactic is a standard topic of debate amongst scholars in the field and one which falls beyond the scope of this study. In the context of boys' school stories, however, explicit didacticism constitutes an obvious attempt to colonise the

reader in the hope that he or she will embrace the various discourses endorsed by the boys' public school ethic.

Of all the books relevant to this study, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is certainly the most overtly didactic. As Quigly (1982:42) puts it, 'the first school story [...] was didactic, a moral tale'. Hughes himself said: 'My sole object in writing was to preach to boys: if I ever write again, it will be to preach to some other age. I can't see that a man has any business to write at all unless he has something he thoroughly believes and wants to preach about' (cited in Knowles & Malmkjaer 1996:111).

Talbot Baines Reed also frequently resorts to (at times perhaps excessive) didacticism. In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*, his preaching takes on a decidedly religious character when he relates how the suffering and defeated Loman finds hope by 'looking away from self and his own poor efforts to Him, the World's Great Burden Bearer, whose blood cleanseth us from all sin'. *Teddy Lester's Chums*, by contrast, contains less blatant didacticism, although Finnemore (1910:311) proved unable to resist the urge to describe

...how bitterly [Curzon] repented, now that it was too late, that he had ever been beguiled to frequent low company at all! The small winnings he had made from time to time had been more than wiped out by much heavier losses [...]. And while he sat there in bitter grief and despair, his companions, who had kept to the straight tack and had filled their time with the cheerful excitements of cricket, footer, and the like honest sports were enjoying a mighty game on the school ground.

Lukens (1995:192) claims that didacticism will always be with us, but the degree of acceptance varies with the reader – indeed, 'the pleasure is diminished for many when the moral seems more important than the characters and their significant experiences'. In *For the Sake of his Chum* (Rhoades 1909), for example, the moral is self-evident from the sequence of events described by the author and the reader is left to draw his or her own conclusions from the narrative.

Mobsley's Mohicans, by contrast, seems to have hardly a moral to preach. In Avery's (1909) book, honour, courage and honesty make only brief appearances and the centre of attention is undoubtedly the action. Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* seems to go so far as to consciously subvert the dominant discourse of didacticism so common in traditional boys' school stories. Conscientiously avoiding even the slightest tendency to moralise, Kipling actually allows his protagonists to mock the didactic aspects of other works in the same genre. In the following excerpt, for example, the central characters poke fun at extracts from Farrar's classics, *Eric* (1858) and *St. Winifred's* (1864) respectively (Kipling [1899] 1994:64):

"Here we are!" said M'Turk. "'Corporal punishment produced on Eric the worst effects. He burned *not* with remorse or regret' – make a note o' that Beetle – 'but with shame and violent indignation. He glared' – oh naughty Eric! Let's get to where he goes in for drink."

"Hold on half a shake. Here's another sample. 'The Sixth,' he says, 'is the palladium of all public schools.' But this lot" – Stalky rapped the gilded book – "can't prevent fellows drinkin' an' stealin', an' lettin' fags out of the window at night, an' – an' doin' what they please. Golly, what we've missed – not goin' to St. Winifred's!"

Kipling's intentional subversion of the moral ethic which permeates Farrar's novel represents not only a complete deviation from the dominant discourse based on the need for didacticism in children's books, but also creates a precedent for other distinctly non-didactic texts.

3.3 RECURRING MOTIFS AND DOMINANT DISCOURSES IN TRADITIONAL BOYS' SCHOOL STORIES

A number of recurring motifs and customary practices, as well as the associated discourses that inform these elements, are discussed below in order to set a benchmark for comparative discussion in later chapters. (These elements are not discussed in exactly the same order in the subsequent chapters focusing on works by Rowling, Morpurgo and Van de Ruit). Particular attention is given to the ways in which discourses that are seen as typical of traditional boys' school

stories influence the representations of the boy protagonist in the context of school and the ways in which such discourses are perpetuated in the texts.⁵⁰

3.3.1 The role of teachers

'Boys are wonderfully astute judges of whether a master will stand nonsense or not, and having discovered that a man cannot keep order, are apt to bring the art of ingenious torment to a high pitch of perfection' (Nevill 1911:300). However, masters who (by whichever means) manage to gain the respect and confidence of their (often unruly) subjects are ideally positioned to influence the thoughts and attitudes of those they are employed to teach. Although it is true that, in traditional boys' school stories, teachers usually only feature 'on the outer periphery of a circle of friendships and enmities' (Cullingford 1998:40), they are, nevertheless, essential, not only for the depiction of the school as a distinctly hierarchical institution, but also for the purpose of enforcing and perpetuating the practices⁵¹ and ideas that are synonymous with the discourses embraced by the public school system.⁵²

⁵⁰ Occasional reference is made to the following valuable historical texts:

- *Memoirs of Eminent Etonians* (1850) by Edward Shepherd Creasy;
- *Confessions of an Etonian* (1846) published under the initials M., I.E;
- *Floreat Etona: Anecdotes and Memories of Eton College* (1911) by Ralph Nevill;
- *Records and Reminiscences of Repton* (1907) by George Stephen Messiter;
- *A Day of My Life; or Everyday Experiences at Eton. By an Eton Boy* (1877), published anonymously, but said to be the work of George Nugent Banks;
- *Eminent Victorians* ([1918] 1981) by Lytton Strachey,
- *Eric, or Little by Little* ([1858] 1859) by Frederic William Farrar; and
- *'In the Days of Thy Youth': Sermons on Practical Subjects Preached at Marlborough College from 1871 to 1876* (1876) by Frederic William Farrar.

⁵¹ An Eton boy, Banks (1877:14), ingenuously questions the sincerity of the masters in their outward support of what he perceives to be inconvenient school customs:

I can't see what the virtue consists in, in dragging us out of bed to come and sit in a cold school-room on a morning like this. I once asked my tutor, and he said, "Discipline, discipline," in a way that made me long to hit him on the head. Why must he needs act the hypocrite? I know he no more likes leaving his bed than I do. Why can't he say so? I'm sure I shouldn't despise him for it, so he needn't be afraid of that.

⁵² For this very reason, school authorities must, of necessity, scrutinise the ideological standpoints of the masters they appoint in order to suppress dissent from imperial ideals at this high level. A telling excerpt from *Floreat Etona* provides evidence of this kind of screening and subsequent elimination:

Moreover, their influence is far-reaching in that many masters become role models for the boy heroes. For example, in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the Doctor (Arnold) becomes the ideal for many of the youngsters. Hughes ([1857] 1971:116) describes the effect that one of the Doctor's sermons has on the impressionable group of boys:

What was it that moved and held us, the rest of the three hundred reckless childish boys, who feared the Doctor with all our hearts, and very little besides in heaven or earth; who thought more of our sets in the School than of the Church of Christ, and put the traditions of Rugby and the public opinion of boys above the laws of God? We couldn't enter into half that we heard [...] but we listened [...] to a man who we felt to be with all his heart and soul and strength striving against whatever was mean and unmanly and unrighteous in our little world.

Similarly, according to Messiter (1907:66) in *Records and Reminiscences of Repton*, the 'really *dominant influence* in Repton was the Headmaster, Dr. Pears; and his influence was felt even more as a man than as a scholar. He was the Headmaster all over' (my emphasis). Mr Justice Denman (cited in Messiter 1907:36) also describes his headmaster in reverent, yet affectionate terms:

In the year 1833, when I entered the School, John Heyrick Macaulay was the Head Master. He was a man of very noble presence, of great natural abilities and conversational powers, of stupendous memory, and with a voice like a powerful organ; (I shall never forget his reading of Judges v.) Much misunderstood, and even dreaded by the younger boys, but found out, as they grew older, to be the soul of kindness and helpfulness and sympathy.

These extracts illustrate, clearly, the role fulfilled by the headmaster in perpetuating not only the dominant discourses of typical public school life, but also the residual discourses (substantiated by specific and general Biblical references) that purportedly justify them. I make this assertion on the premise that the 'residual' (as opposed to the 'archaic') is 'effectively *formed* in the past,

Indeed, during his tenure of the Headmastership, which lasted sixteen years, four Assistant Masters are said to have left Eton owing to Dr. Hornby disapproving of some of their ideas. One of these exiles was young Mr. Joynes, whose socialistic tendencies obviously unfitted him for the post of an Eton master. (Nevill 1911:202)

Later we are informed (quite unnecessarily), that the 'vast majority of the parents of Eton boys do not wish their sons to be taught Socialism, and the school-yard, so closely connected with the old traditions of Eton, is the very last place where any theories of this kind should be permitted to be aired' (Nevill 1911:296).

but [...] *still active* in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but *as an effective element of the present* (Williams 1977:122; my emphases). The maintenance of a residual discourse as an active and effective element of the present suggests active perpetuation – whether subconscious or deliberate – of that discourse; hence Williams’s categorisation of religious beliefs as predominantly residual.

According to Honey (1977:55), '[r]eligion and education were believed to be inseparable' during the Victorian era. Chapel attendance by public schoolboys was compulsory and, as most headmasters were also ordained clerics, their weekly sermons were specifically formulated to address what they considered relevant aspects of boyhood. The following excerpt from Dean Farrar's *'In the Days of Thy Youth': Sermons on Practical Subjects Preached at Marlborough College from 1871 to 1876* (1876:4) aptly reflects the tone and intention typical of such orations:

Oh, on this first Sunday of a new half-year let every one of us, from the oldest to the youngest, strive to feel and know that God is; that He is the rewarder of all them that diligently seek Him; that every sin we commit is committed in His presence; that His eye is always upon us, never slumbering nor sleeping: in the busy scenes of day about our path; in the silent watches of the night about our bed. Who, my brethren, whether in defiance or in turmoil, whether in prosperity or in despair, ever succeeded in concealing himself from God?

Not all of the sermons had their desired effect, however. For example, the soporific Dr Goodford, candidly described in *Floreat Etona* by Ralph Nevill (1911:203), certainly does not seem to have conveyed many of the presumably edifying discourses contained in his prolonged sermons to his somnolent schoolboy audience:

At that time the old Fellows who were still alive used to preach the most lengthy and incomprehensible sermons in Chapel, but in that line Dr. Goodford easily held his own against all. Owing to a peculiar intonation, his mouth always seemed to be full of pebbles, and it was practically impossible to make out one sentence of the vast number which trickled from his lips. Nevertheless we rather liked the good old man, whose curious sing-song induced sleep rather than irritation. Dr. Goodford's entry into Chapel with the aged verger, who on account of the silver wand he bore was called the "Holy Poker," was a thing which many Etonians will recall to mind.

Moreover, in *Confessions of an Etonian*, the author, simply indicated as M., I.E. (1846:26), highlights what he perceives to be a disadvantage of the combination of the roles of master and cleric: ‘His religion is not to be flogged or forced into a boy, like so much Latin and Greek, or even to be instilled into him by a comparative stranger.’ Given that the masters, by all accounts, made constant use of harsh corporal punishment to discipline errant boys, the idea that these same masters were also ordained by the church to lead the boys to experience the joys of salvation does, indeed, seem somewhat problematic. Strachey ([1918] 1981:166) highlights the apparent conflict inherent in this system by describing, with a distinct sense of irony, the lawless state of affairs at Eton during Keate’s headmastership:

Every Sunday afternoon [Keate] attempted to read sermons to the whole school assembled; and every Sunday afternoon the whole school assembled shouted him down. The scenes in Chapel were far from edifying: while some antique fellow doddered in the pulpit, rats would be let loose to scurry among the legs of the exploding boys. But next morning the hand of discipline would reassert itself; and the savage ritual of the flogging block would remind a batch of whimpering children that, though sins against man and God might be forgiven them, a false quantity could only be expiated in tears and blood.

The protagonists in *Stalky & Co.* state the case more explicitly, while approving of their own headmaster’s non-clerical status (Kipling [1899] 1994:131):

“But he’s awfully fair. He doesn’t lick a chap in the morning an’ preach at him in the afternoon,” said Beetle.

“He can’t; he ain’t in Orders, thank goodness,” said M’Turk. Number Five held the very strongest views on clerical head-masters, and were ever ready to meet their pastor [Reverend John] in argument.

“Almost all other schools have clerical Heads,” said the Reverend John gently.

“It isn’t fair on the chaps,” Stalky replied. “Makes ‘em sulky...”

In his autobiographical *Boy: Tales of Childhood*, Roald Dahl ([1984] 2003), who was educated at Repton, questions the compatibility of Christian discourses of salvation with the tradition of caning so common in boys’ public schools and the combination of these distinctly and essentially different elements in a clerical headmaster. In his chapter entitled ‘The Headmaster’, he expounds on what he

perceives as the complete contradiction of opposing discourses embodied within a single character. He states his opinion in unambiguous terms:

At the end of [the caning procedure], a basin, a sponge and a small clean towel were produced by the Headmaster, and the victim was told to wash away the blood before pulling up his trousers.

Do you wonder then that this man's behaviour used to puzzle me tremendously? He was an ordinary clergyman at that time as well as being Headmaster, and I would sit in the dim light of the school chapel and listen to him preaching about the Lamb of God and about Mercy and Forgiveness and all the rest of it and my young mind would become totally confused. I knew very well that only the night before this preacher had shown neither Forgiveness nor Mercy in flogging some small boy who had broken the rules.

Did they preach one thing and practice another, these men of God? And if someone had told me at the time that this flogging clergyman was one day to become the Archbishop of Canterbury, I would never have believed it.

It was all this, I think, that made me begin to have doubts about religion and even about God. If this person, I kept telling myself, was one of God's chosen salesmen on earth, then there must be something very wrong about the whole business. (Dahl [1984] 2003:304)

It is evident, from this extract, that, in Dahl's case at least, the headmaster's sermons not only failed to convert the youngster to Christianity, but the headmaster's apparent hypocrisy caused him to question the fundamental elements of the church system and, by extension, the validity of Christianity as a viable discourse by which he should conduct his affairs.

Nevertheless, despite the arguments against the custom, most traditional boys' public school stories depict the clerical master in a particularly favourable light. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, for example, Hughes depicts the Doctor as successfully leading one of Tom's best friends, Harry East, to salvation. The new convert says of his revered headmaster (who has, incidentally, caned⁵³ East on several occasions) shortly after the interview: '– I can hardly remember what he said, yet; but it seemed to spread around me like healing, and strength, and light;

⁵³ According to Lytton Strachey ([1918] 1981:170), 'when Dr Arnold considered a flogging necessary, he administered it with gravity. For he had no theoretical objection to corporal punishment. On the contrary, he supported it, as was his wont, by an appeal to general principles. "There is," he said, "an essential inferiority in a boy as compared with a man"; and hence "where there is no equality the exercise of superiority implied in personal chastisement" inevitably followed'.

and to bear me up, and plant me on a rock, where I could hold my footing and fight for myself. I don't know what to do, I feel so happy' (Hughes [1857] 1971:261). Thus Hughes portrays the headmaster as both a stern disciplinarian and an apparently worthy representative of the Gospel⁵⁴ – in short, as an able custodian of the boys placed in his care.⁵⁵

Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996:86) suggest that the moral training commenced within the family⁵⁶ (noticeably absent from the stories) is continued by 'surrogate institutions' such as schools and that masters or headmasters often assume the role of father⁵⁷ for the pupils (acting *in loco parentis*). They substantiate their remarks by pointing out that it was because of the Doctor's intervention that Tom Brown overcomes his moral weaknesses. That Hughes links the roles of father and teacher is evident in the closing paragraph of the book, where he asserts that 'it is only through our mysterious human relationships, [...] through the strength and courage and wisdom of fathers, and brothers, and teachers, that we can come to the knowledge of Him' (Hughes [1857] 1971:288).

⁵⁴ Proverbs 23 verses 13 and 14 present a unique combination of harsh discipline and salvation – one which clerical headmasters evidently took to heart: ¹³ Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. ¹⁴ Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell' (All Biblical quotes in this chapter are drawn from the Authorised King James Version [1611] 1982).

⁵⁵ Some headmasters used the cane primarily as a means of official reproach. For example, Nevill (1911:288) recalls that at Eton,

...it was only the swishings of the Lower master which inflicted any real physical pain, the few strokes which the Head, Dr. Hornby, administered being generally more in the nature of a formal reproof than anything else; at least that was the experience of the present writer, who well remembers that on retiring from the torture-chamber next Upper School he reflected that if one was to be flogged at all, the thing could not be conducted in a more pleasant and dignified way.

⁵⁶ In *Confessions of an Etonian*, the author, M., I.E. (1846:41), remarks concerning his relationship with his brothers: 'Ever distant then in our days of boyhood, [...] now that the causalities of after-life have dispersed us, we are become, to all intents and purposes, entire strangers one towards the other.'

⁵⁷ In traditional boys' school stories, fathers are often depicted as aloof and distant, though loving, characters that seldom indulge in outward shows of affection. In *Confessions of an Etonian* (M., I.E. 1846:41) the author confides: 'As to my father, he was, of course, wholly engaged in the cares of providing for so large and expensive a family; and though a man, I am persuaded, of strong and ardent affection for his children, I can barely say that I was acquainted with him. Accustomed to this sort of distant intercourse from my infancy, I was desirous of no other....'

That Tom Brown comes to respect and admire his erstwhile headmaster as a surrogate father figure is evident from the last chapter in which he attempts to master his grief after Arnold's unexpectedly early death at the age of forty-seven:

If he could only have seen the Doctor again for one five minutes, to have told him all that was on his heart, what he owed to him, how he loved and revered him, and would by God's help follow his steps in life and death, he could have borne it all without a murmur. But that he should have gone away for ever without knowing it all, was too much to bear. (Hughes [1857] 1971:287)

The representation of masters as highly principled mentors is not unusual in early boys' school stories. In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*, for example, Stephen Greenfield becomes so engrossed in petty Fourth Form politics that his standard of academic work is severely affected. His form master, Mr Rastle, intervenes by gently advising him to seek God's guidance and help:

"At school, my boy, as elsewhere, it is a safe rule, whenever one is in doubt, to avoid everything, no matter who may be the tempter, of which one cannot fearlessly speak to one's father or mother, and above all, to our Heavenly Father. Don't be afraid of Him – He will always be ready to help you and to guide you with his Holy Spirit" (Reed [1881] 1887:78).

In giving such advice, Mr Rastle is evidently assuming the role of 'surrogate father' for Stephen, who is not only far away from home, but also fatherless. His advice clearly imitates the kind that a good father would want to give his son before he leaves the protection of the family circle. So, for example, Squire Brown's parting words to Tom encourage Tom to 'tell the truth, keep a brave and kind heart, and never listen to or say anything you wouldn't have your mother and sister hear, and you'll never feel ashamed to come home, or we to see you' (Hughes [1857] 1971:64).

On the other hand, in Kipling's controversial *Stalky & Co.*, the boys actually poke fun at their house-master, nicknamed 'Heffy', who (in their opinion) takes his role as 'surrogate father' far too literally (Kipling [1899] 1994:17):

"It's all right. The Hefflelinga means well. [...] Told me last night after prayers that he was *in loco parentis*," Beetle grunted.

“The deuce he did!” cried Stalky. “That means he’s maturin’ something unusual dam’ mean. Last time he told me that he gave me three hundred lines for dancin’ the cachuca in Number Ten dormitory. *Loco parentis*, by gum!”

Nevertheless, Kipling’s subtle and humorous subversion of this motif presents itself as a deviation from the norm presented in the majority of traditional boys’ school stories, which propagate the dominant discourse that positions public schoolmasters as standing (in a moral as well as in a disciplinary sense) *in loco parentis* to the boys.

3.3.2 The role of prefects

The behaviour of prefects and monitors is often a central aspect of boys’ school stories. This is because they are ‘symbols of an authority that is centred on the headmaster and through him on the house-masters’ (Cullingford 1998:40). The introduction of the prefect system as a method of governance in public schools is said to be one of the most effective innovations established by Dr Arnold of Rugby. When contemplating possible means of establishing order, Arnold decided to adopt “‘the principle which seemed to him to have been adopted in the childhood of the human race itself”. He would treat the boys at Rugby as Jehovah had treated the Chosen People of Isreal: he would found a theocracy; and there should be Judges in Isreal’ (Strachey [1918] 1981:168). Thus, prefects became ‘the keystone of [Arnold’s] whole system: not a set of officials [...], but the headmaster’s moral agents, his fellow workers in the task of infusing superior elements into the society of boys’ (Honey 1977:11).

The high ideals professed by Arnold as his justification for the implementation of the prefect system were, nevertheless, of little comfort to the young boys who bore the brunt of the hierarchical regime – as Dahl (1977:201) recalls, the ‘nastiest of all [...] was the fact that prefects were allowed to beat their fellow pupils’. For example, in the following excerpt from *Teddy Lester’s Schooldays*, Finnemore ([1911] 1953:24) emphasises the fact that prefects possess the right to inflict corporal punishment on miscreants:

“F-a-a-a-g!” The long-drawn shout was all to no effect and then the prefect’s ears caught the sound of a distant uproar. “Oh,” said Holland, half-aloud, “that’s it is it? The little beast’s somewhere off on a rag. I’ll talk to him.”

The prefect stepped back into his room, *caught up the thick yellow cane which was the symbol of authority*, and strode briskly for the seat of war, his ears guiding him as he caught the sounds of battle from afar. (my emphasis)

Imbued with such power, and the ability to control, to a large extent, the behavioural patterns and daily activities of younger boys, prefects also play a significant role not only in the transmission, but also in the enforcement of practices associated with dominant discourses in the context of the public school. In the above passage, for instance, the prefect is seeking out the absent fag (or young schoolboy) in order to instil in him (most deliberately and painfully) a sense of respect for his elders (however young) that will make the boy respond promptly and eagerly to the prefect’s summons. By exercising his authority in this manner, the prefect thus simultaneously ensures the continuation of the custom of fagging and reaffirms his hierarchical position in the social structure of the school.

In traditional boys’ school stories, prefects usually go to considerable lengths to demonstrate their right to mete out punishment, and their actions are often endorsed without question. For instance, in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, we are told that the prefects

...dash in every now and then, and generally chastise some quiet, timid boy who is equally afraid of acorns and canes, while the principal performers get dexterously out of the way; and so calling-over rolls on somehow, much like the big world, punishments lighting on wrong shoulders, and matters going generally in a queer, cross-grained way, but the end coming somehow, which is after all the great point. (Hughes [1857] 1971:86)

Despite the obvious inadequacies of the system, the very fact that such severe physical punishment should be allowed in school at all is rationalised, it would seem, by the oft-repeated warning, ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’, which is based, no doubt, on Proverbs 13: ‘He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes’. Thus, the dominant discourse of corporal punishment is easily supported by a residual discourse drawn from

Scripture – a source which the majority of the British population of the time did not wish to question. Nevertheless, as is evident from this quotation, the Bible does not give explicit licence to anyone other than the parent to execute this form of chastisement, and hence, one can only assume that the tradition of consigning this right to masters and senior boys (prefects, monitors or ‘top boys’) had become so synonymous with the discourse of discipline in public schools that its validity and suitability was no longer questioned – it had become, to use Foucault’s term, a pre-existing form of continuity.⁵⁸

The tradition does not, however, seem to have gone entirely unchallenged. I base this assumption on Hughes’s defensive, dogmatic and even disdainful tone in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* when he attempts to justify the ‘good sound thrashing’ of a bully by a particularly strong prefect, in front of the whole house, on the headmaster’s orders (Hughes [1857] 1971:165):

Now I don’t want any wiseacres to read this book; but if they should, of course they will prick up their long ears, and howl, or rather bray, at the above story. Very good, I don’t object; but what I have to add for you boys is this, that [...] years afterwards, that boy sought out Holmes [the prefect], and thanked him, saying it had been the kindest act which had ever been done upon him, and the turning point in his character; and a very good fellow he became, and a credit to his school.

In this excerpt, Hughes is evidently attempting to justify the perhaps debatable means by their desirable end.

Nevertheless, while some prefects portrayed in traditional boys’ school stories grossly abuse their privileges, good, honest leaders are depicted as responsible disciplinarians who strive to use their authority to eradicate bullying,⁵⁹ stealing and cheating in their respective domains. In *Teddy Lester’s Schooldays*, for example, Finnemore ([1911] 1953:100) informs the reader that ‘Dormitory No. 8 had a new ruler. There had been such persistent and flagrant ragging in it that Calvert had been proved unfit for command, and the room had been placed

⁵⁸ As mentioned in Chapter Two, Section 2.2

⁵⁹ An Old Etonian, Neville (1911:312), observes that ‘many sensitive boys educated at schools where bullying has prevailed have felt the results of it in a tamed and often broken spirit.’

under Arthur Digby, whose firm and fair handling held the balance equal between big and little, old and young, in No. 8'. Similarly, when Tom Pole, the dormitory prefect in *Teddy Lester's Chums*, finally decides to assert his authority over Curzon (the bully) and his friends, Finnemore (1910:57) speaks with great respect of the timid prefect who thinks matters over and finally works up the courage to confront the bullies in the interests of the smaller boys.

Cullingford (1998:46) is of the opinion that in school stories, something 'far more worrying than harsh discipline in a school is any sign of slackness, since the boys look up to and imitate those in authority over them'. He quotes a passage from *Tom, Dick and Harry* (one of Talbot Baines Reed's school stories) in which the head boy experiences some personal difficulties. He has trouble coping with the situation and we are told that '[n]o news flies so fast in a school as that of a responsible head boy being slack or "out of collar". And [...] so it was, slackness reigned supreme' (cited in Cullingford 1998:46).

The prefects, as well as other senior boys with disciplinary authority, are thus seen as an indispensable, stabilising force within the school microcosm whose primary goal it is to regulate the behaviour of younger boys in conformity with the rules, traditions and customs of their school: in other words, to ensure that the dominant discourses of British boys' public schools are transmitted, essentially intact, from one generation of schoolboys to the next.

3.3.3 The fagging system

In addition to the recognition of the formal authority of the prefects, the point is often made that, at each level, the individual has a certain degree of power over his immediate inferiors. This creates a system in which all who pass through the school will eventually have the opportunity to exercise authority over others. The system of 'fags', in which the junior boys became the unpaid servants of senior students, was seen as 'an initiation ceremony through which all would of necessity go, slowly and painfully' (Cullingford 1998:41). It was seen as a way of

teaching the importance of recognising authority and power differentials. An old Etonian, Nevill (1911:309), explains:

Thirty years ago [the 1880s] a fag's duties consisted in laying his fagmaster's breakfast, procuring chops, steaks, kidneys, or sausages from a sock shop, making toast, and poaching eggs. He had to attend at tea-time again, but then as a rule was not called upon to do anything in particular, his appearance at that hour being more or less a matter of form. Besides this, a fag had to carry notes and render other similar services when required to do so, while obliged to answer to the call of "Lower boy" shouted by any one in Upper Division. [...] The most irksome part formerly was being obliged to answer the call of "Lower boy," when every one "fagable" was obliged to rush at headlong speed to the caller, the last to arrive being the one who had to perform the particular service required.

This state of affairs sets the tone for another issue that is frequently raised in traditional boys' school stories: only bullies and unprincipled seniors would abuse the privileges⁶⁰ of such a system. The main interest of the plot, therefore, often centres on how the younger boys get the upper hand over the older students – usually in a fight – and how the bigger boys handle their 'come-uppance'. In *Teddy Lester's Chums*, for instance, the tiny (but skilled) Ito Nagao holds Curzon, the bully, in a torturous grip and forces him to say: 'I will attempt no more bullying in Number ten' (Finnemore 1910:134). A similar scene transpires in Kipling's *Stalky and Co.* in which the younger boys succeed in conquering the bullies: 'From the floor Sefton made unconditional surrender, more abjectly even than Campbell. He would never touch any one again. He would go softly all the days of his life' (Kipling [1899] 1994:153).

Nevertheless, victory over the bullies neither happens easily, nor occurs without a certain amount of physical suffering on the part of the little rebels. Mansford's *The Fourth Form at Westbourne* contains a typical episode in which a prefect tries to assert his authority over a junior boy:

⁶⁰ While much of the abuse described in school stories took the form of ill-treatment and bullying, the fagging system was exploited in many ways:

Another disagreeable form of fagging which has now long been extinct was crib fagging, which consisted in a small boy being obliged to read out a crib to an assemblage of big ones. As a rule, on these occasions another fag would be posted in the passage outside in order to give time for the crib to be secreted should there be any chance of the tutor making his unwelcome appearance (Nevill 1911:311).

"Come, say it's fair!" commanded Thorpe, and by way of urging the fag to speak he seized his cane, which always lay handy, and dealt him a blow across the shoulders which made him stagger backwards. (cited in Cullingford 1998:41)

In this instance, we witness a prefect using his position of power in an attempt to force a small boy to conform, in terms not only of his outward actions, but also of his attitudes and opinions, to the dominant discourse of discipline as upheld by the prefect.

In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*, a senior, Loman, uses his authority as a monitor and his physical strength to force Stephen Greenfield, one of the protagonists, into fagging for him. When the young boy refuses to serve him, Loman becomes unreasonably aggressive and beats him mercilessly. Tom Brown receives similar treatment from Flashman when he refuses to be ordered about. We are told that the bully 'laid wait, and caught Tom before second lesson, and receiving a point blank "No" when told to fetch his hat, seized him, and twisted his arm, and went through the other methods of torture in use' (Hughes [1857] 1971:140).

Another negative effect of the fagging system on junior boys is brought to light by C.S. Lewis ([1955] 1991:80) in his account of life at Wyvern College in which he remarks that '[f]or a reason which all English readers will understand [...] I am humiliated and embarrassed at having to record that as time went on I came to dislike the fagging system. No true defender of the Public Schools will believe me if I say that I was tired. But I was – dog-tired, cab-horse tired ...' Similarly, in *Confessions of an Etonian*, a telling little excerpt, consisting of a dialogue between a relatively new Eton boy and a young girl, suggests that fagging was an altogether exhausting experience (M., I.E. 1846:36):

"As you have been so short a time at Eton, I suppose you have not yet been punished?"

"Oh yes, many times. I got a capital flogging yesterday."

"Will you tell me what you were flogged for?"

"For eating in church."

"And what could make you do that?"

"I had been fagging all the morning, Miss Curzon; and having no time for breakfast, I went into church with my rolls in my pocket, and one of the masters saw me eating them."

It is interesting to note that in most of these stories, it is taken for granted that the fagging system does, and should exist. In fact, by the time of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, it seems to have become an established part of the order of the public school⁶¹ with its own governing rules and acceptable practices. We are informed that 'Tom, as a new boy, was of right excused fagging for the first month, but in his enthusiasm for his new life, this privilege hardly pleased him' (Hughes [1857] 1971:118). In this sense, one may legitimately speak of a discourse of fagging in that it is a practice that systematically forms the objects of which it speaks.⁶² *Ergo*, fags and fagmasters, as well as the relationships between them, exist because of an institutionalised and widely accepted discourse. Moreover, this dominant discourse is maintained and perpetuated on various hierarchical levels.

For example, the Doctor in *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* goes so far as to say to his colleagues: "You know I'm heretic enough to believe that a certain amount of fagging does not do harm in a school like ours" (Reed [1881] 1887:188). It would seem that Talbot Baines Reed also supports the system because of his treatment of the 'fagging' motif in this book. Although the Guinea-Pigs and Tadpoles (the fags of the Fourth Form Junior) rebel against their superiors, Reed treats the episode with patient good humour. Nevertheless, the Doctor's specific use of the term 'heretic' would suggest that there was perhaps some debate concerning this issue.

⁶¹ For some, rather unfortunate boys, the discourse of fagging was not confined to public school, but had become so internalised and accepted by their siblings that it even permeated home life. The author of *Confessions of Etonian*, for example, recalls: 'When I returned for the holidays to the paternal roof, it was only to be fagged by my elder brethren; for here the fagging system, I regret to say, was not only tolerated, but carried out to its most deplorable extreme' (M., I.E. 1846:41).

⁶² As mentioned in Chapter Two, Section 2.2.

Hughes ([1857] 1971:137), however, actually makes fun of the youngsters by describing the relevant scenes in pseudo-sensational terms. For instance, the uprising led by Tom Brown and his friend East is described thus:

Their story was told – the war of independence had broken out – who would join the revolutionary forces? Several others present bound themselves not to fag for the Fifth Form at once. One or two only edged off, and left rebels. What else could they do?

In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*, as in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, such revolts last only a very short while, after which the fags return to their post of duty with surprising complacency and goodwill.

It should also be noted, moreover, that not all fagmasters are cruel and unreasonably demanding. In fact, in his highly entertaining book entitled *A Day of my Life, or Everyday Experiences at Eton, by an Eton Boy*, Bankes (1877:73) presents the system of fagging from the (rather shy and self-conscious, but nevertheless, comical) fagmaster's point of view:

Ah! Here's my fag. He wants to know if I want him this morning. What a question! He asks this every morning, and as I want him every morning, I should think he might give it up soon; one would think breakfast-fagging was a new invention from the surprise he always evinces when I tell him that of course I want him. My fag is a study altogether. Having had various sorts of fags, I thought I should like to try and train up the raw material, as I found that fags as a rule after their first half begin to get rather too sharp, so I went and asked the Captain to give me a new fellow, and he certainly has selected about the rawest material he could find. He is incapable of anything. [...] He is rather bigger than I am, but I am sure he stands in great terror of my eye, and he is very nervous, because whenever I look at him or reprove him he looks sadly and reproachfully at me, and looks as if he was going to have a fit or burst into tears, so that I begin to feel frightened and inclined to fall down on my knees and say, "Oh, don't cry, or don't have a fit, please don't ; I'll bear anything, even tea made with cold water, or anything you like, only please don't cry." But really he's a hopeless job. I have already resolved to have no more to do with the raw material.

One's experience of fagging (fictional or real), therefore, seems to be largely determined by the kind(s) of fagmaster(s) one is assigned to obey. Moreover, Hughes ([1857] 1971:182), points out that many 'noble friendships' arose between big and little boys as a result of the system. The following excerpt from

Records and Reminiscences of Repton bears testament to a relationship that was mutually agreeable (Messiter 1907:42):

Samuel Symes Cox, a noble specimen of a Dorsetshire lad, rising eighteen years old and intended for the Army, had been obliged to leave Rugby, and was heartily welcome at Repton, and especially to me; for it was at once seen that a fight for the Cockship of the School was inevitable. This soon took place, and Cox became my owner (so far as the manufacture of Verses was concerned) and I his willing slave; and so he “fought for me at Repton”.

In his fascinating study entitled *Empire Boys*, Joseph Bristow (1991:81) highlights yet another aspect of the discourse of fagging. He asserts that ‘sexual relations between boys – for all their tabu (sic) status – are in evidence, and they become more and more infamous as the century draws to a close. As early as *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* homosexuality can be glimpsed’. He bases his claim on a passage from Hughes’s novel in which Tom and his friend East have refused to be called to fag by a young boy from another house, a ‘small friend’ in the service of an older student:

The youth was seized, and dragged struggling out of the quadrangle into the School-house hall. He was one of the miserable little pretty white-handed curly-headed boys, *petted and pampered* by some of the big fellows, who wrote their verses for them, taught them to drink and use bad language and did all they could to *spoil them for everything in this world and the next*. (Hughes [1857] 1971:182; my emphases)

One can thus infer that the young boy, with his pretty, feminine attributes, is very much the favourite of his older ‘protectors’, and homosexual involvement is quite possibly the reason for the assertion that he is being ‘spoiled for everything’.⁶³ In his autobiographical account, *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis ([1955] 1991:73) describes this type of boy as a ‘Tart’, that is, ‘a pretty and effeminate-looking small boy who acts as a catamite to one or more of his seniors’.

⁶³ Kipling adds a bit of tongue-in-cheek humour to the debate in *Stalky & Co.* when one of the protagonists remarks:

‘Did you suppose we went around corruptin’ the minds of the fags?’ said Beetle. ‘They haven’t any to begin with; and if they had, they’re corrupted long ago. I’ve been a fag, Padre.’ (Kipling [1899] 1994:125)

By suggesting that such boys⁶⁴ are spoiled not only for this world, but also the next, Hughes may be seen as substantiating his view (which represents the then dominant discourse regarding sexual relations) by drawing on a residual discourse contained in the Bible that condemns such relationships.⁶⁵ It is interesting, then, that within a micro-society ruled (in most instances) by a zealous and active clerical headmaster, such activities were often accepted with an unusual degree of complacency. Lewis ([1955] 1991:73), too, comments (with evident sarcasm) on the tolerance for this aspect of school life:

Though our oligarchy kept most of the amenities of life to themselves, they were, on this point, liberal; they did not impose chastity on the middle-class boy in addition to all his other disabilities. Pederasty among the lower classes was not “side”, or at least not serious side; not like putting one’s hands in one’s pockets or wearing one’s coat unbuttoned. The gods had a sense of proportion.

In his book *Tom Brown’s Universe*, Honey (1977:183) observes that ‘close associations between boys of different ages in different houses were suspect by the end of the century; indeed, in some schools by 1900 if such boys were even seen speaking, immorality would be taken for granted’. Lewis’s representation of public school life suggests, moreover, that such relationships were not merely countenanced, but common, as is evident from his assertion that

...you will have missed the atmosphere of our House unless you picture the whole place from week’s end to week’s end buzzing, tittering, hinting, whispering about this subject. After games, gallantry was the principal topic of polite conversation; who had “a case with” whom, whose star was in the ascendant, who had whose photo, who and when and how often and what night and where ... I suppose it might be called the Greek Tradition.⁶⁶ (Lewis [1955] 1991:74)

Bristow (1991:82) is of the opinion that public schools, ‘those places where the finest men were prepared for the best positions in life, created the conditions

⁶⁴ The eminently manly Tom Brown describes this type of boy as the “[w]orst sort we breed,” [...] Thank goodness no big fellow ever took to petting me’ (Hughes [1857] 1971:183).

⁶⁵ Romans 1 states: ²⁷ And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence [sic] of their error which was meet. [...] ³² Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but have pleasure in them that do them.

⁶⁶ Bristow (1991:83) notes that in Forster’s *Maurice*, written in 1914, ‘an early scene shows several undergraduates translating from the *Phaedrus* for their tutor who, noticing the scandal about to appear in the text, instructs them to pass over the “unspeakable vice of the Greeks”’.

where strictly forbidden desires became strong enough to risk expulsion'.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, since homosexuality contravened the guiding principles of the Judaeo-Christian religious code, and since it was regarded as neither adventurous nor manly, it could only be mentioned obliquely in fiction.⁶⁸ Thus one may argue that the dominant discourse of fagging, in particular, created the conditions for the development and perpetuation of an emergent discourse of sexuality that was in direct conflict with the dominant discourses of the time.

Nevertheless, when one is studying early schoolboy literature, one should not be misled by the frequent use of the word 'love' in descriptions of friendships between boys. Until the 1890s, boys were not afraid to describe their feelings for one another as a kind of love, and it is only after Oscar Wilde's imprisonment that the danger arose of 'manly love' being mistaken for 'the Love that dare not speak its name' (Bristow 1991:82).

So, for example, in *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*, Reed ([1881] 1887:248) describes the reconciliation of Oliver Greenfield and Wraysford in the following manner: "The falling out of faithful friends" – as the old copybooks say in elegant Virgilian Latin – "renewing is of love".' Reed ([1881] 1887:247) continues his description thus:

Oh! the happiness of that precious quarter of an hour, when the veil that has divided two faithful friends is suddenly dashed aside, and they rush one to the other, calling themselves every imaginable bad name in the dictionary, insisting to the verge of quarrelling that it was all their fault, and no fault of the other, far too rapturous to talk ordinary common sense.

Similarly, in *Eric, or Little by Little* by Dean Farrar (from whose sermon as headmaster of Marlborough College I quoted earlier), an idyllic scene is created

⁶⁷ Alec Waugh's *The Loom of Youth* (1917) was written shortly after the author was removed from his school (at the request of the headmaster) for improper behaviour. In this publication Waugh points out that 'homosexual desire is, ironically enough, *enabled* by the public school even though it is actually forbidden there' (Bristow 1991:87; my emphasis).

⁶⁸ While this is the case with the majority of boys' school stories, several non-conventional publications deal with this issue as a central theme. One of these, *Lord Dismiss Us* (1967), by Michael Campbell, deals particularly with 'the danger' that 'lies in the attraction and attractiveness, the jealousy and intrigues and the growth of love both sacred and profane in this microcosm of society' (inner cover description of 1968 edition).

in which two of the main characters pledge eternal friendship (Farrar [1858] 1859:37):

At last Eric broke the silence. “Russell, let me always call you Edwin, and call me Eric.”

“Very gladly, Eric. Your coming here has made me so happy.” And the two boys squeezed each other’s hands, and looked into each other’s faces, and silently promised that they would be loving friends forever.⁶⁹

The majority of books relevant to this study that were published after 1900 make no mention of ‘love’ or ‘rapturous’ emotions with regard to the friendships between boys. Although the books deal extensively with interpersonal relationships (this is implicit in the titles *Teddy Lester’s Chums*, *Stalky & Co.* and *For the Sake of his Chum*), the respective authors are careful not to shed a shadow of doubt over the moral and sexual conformity of the boy heroes and their closest friends to the dominant discourses of the time.

3.3.4 Discourses of courage and cowardice

Another aspect of public school life that receives a substantial amount of attention in this kind of fiction is the importance of bravery and courage. In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic’s*, Reed ([1881] 1887:265) comments that the boys

could forgive a school fellow for doing a disobedient act sometimes, or perhaps even a vicious act, but a cowardly or dishonourable action was a thing which nothing would excuse, and which they felt was not only a disgrace to the boy perpetrating it, but a disgrace put upon themselves.

According to Tom Brown, cowardice is ‘the incarnation of all other sins’ (Hughes [1857] 1971:117); and Jimmy Karlake, in *For the Sake of his Chum*, considers that he had often ‘seen boys show the white feather, evade a charge at football, jump away from a fast bowler, or grow pale at the prospect of a caning; and it always filled him with a wondering contempt’ (Rhoades 1909:56). Jimmy

⁶⁹ Farrar’s schoolboy narratives have been criticised for their emotional intensity. The following extract from *Eric* details an opinion that possibly explains his reasoning for this (Farrar [1858]1859:18): ‘School life, like all other life, is an April day of shower and sunshine. Its joys may be more childish, its sorrows more trifling, than those of after years; – but they are more keenly felt.’

Karslake's headmaster expresses similar sentiments by observing that it fills him with a deep 'sense of humiliation' to think that any one of his boys should display signs of 'arrant cowardice' and 'lack of honourable feeling' (Rhoades 1909:59). Similarly, Jimmy's captain, Leicester, comments that many of the boys felt 'frightfully sick' when Karslake 'left them to believe he was behaving like a cad', because 'he was the last chap in the world we thought likely to do a thing like that' (Rhoades 1909:311). By contrast, we are told that for Jimmy Karslake (who, by all accounts, is the ultimate hero),

the nervous tremors that often preceded a thrashing were strangers to him, to stop an ugly rush at football was a delight, the chances of punishment in a fight were taken as a matter of course; anything, indeed, with a spice of danger gave to it an added pleasure. (Rhoades 1909:60)

In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*, Oliver Greenfield makes a resolution to exercise self-restraint. This causes him to run the risk of being called a coward when he tries to control his temper and not return Loman's blow which was 'a cowardly one, and certainly unmerited, and by all schoolboy tradition one fairly demanding a return. Could it be possible their man was lacking in courage? The idea was a shock to most present' (Reed [1881] 1887:90). Oliver is subjected to a dreadful amount of censure because of his apparent lack of 'pluck' and even his fine performance on the cricket field is not enough to redeem him from the condemnation of his school fellows. In this instance, Oliver seems to be caught between the conflicting interests of two different dominant discourses. In trying to 'conquer his own spirit', an endeavour clearly endorsed in boys' school stories⁷⁰ and substantiated by religious discourses that would, in all probability, have been preached in the school chapel,⁷¹ he is viewed as not conforming to the requirements of what his peers consider an acceptable discourse of courage that is validated by a willingness to fight.

⁷⁰ See Hughes ([1857] 1971:179).

⁷¹ Proverbs 16: ³² 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.'

Nevertheless, in most of Finnemore's novels, the protagonists are invariably described as 'plucky' and full of gumption. Ito Nagao is frequently referred to as 'the brave little Jap' and Jimmy West displays incredible courage when he defends himself against the bullies on his very first day at Slapton. This brings to mind another characteristic theme: bullies are usually cowards who cannot handle the treatment they themselves mete out to their juniors. In *Teddy Lester's Chums*, when Tom Pole, the prefect, finally decides to chastise the dormitory bullies, their responses are far from heroic. The youngsters are thrilled when 'at the second cut, Gibson howled. At the third he wept. At the fourth cut he prayed for mercy'. Palmer, on the other hand 'was snuffling before the first cut fell, and, to the immense pleasure of the onlookers, he accompanied each blow with a series of howls and groans most touching to listen to' (Finnemore 1910:127).

In terms of the dominant discourses of courage and discipline, the ability to take one's punishment 'like a man' is part of the rite of passage which boys must undergo. For example, in *Confessions of an Etonian*, the author (M., I.E. 1846:21) explains that 'a very few days had elapsed before I had become a genuine Etonian, which a boy is never accounted until he has been once flogged. Notwithstanding my respect of that honourable title, I was still very unwilling to purchase it so dearly'. The express conviction in this kind of fiction that 'six of the best, every day, made me what I am' provides evidence that most boys were actually proud of being able to handle a caning. The fictional masters also seem to consider it their duty to 'lay on lustily' and lick the youngsters into shape:⁷²

Give him a good caning for his disobedience; he's worth it, for 'though he is a disagreeable oaf, we must give him his chance. If he can't be licked into shape,

⁷² In *Floreat Etona*, Nevill (1911:287) emphasises the courage of the victim of a tremendous flogging administered by an Eton master:

In the latter capacity, though an extremely kind-hearted man, he could, as was well known to the boys under his charge, be severe enough upon occasion, and the writer well remembers seeing him administer what was considered a tremendous flogging to a delinquent, who afterwards had a distinguished military career. This consisted of some thirty-two cuts laid on with two birches, to the great astonishment of a number of Lower boys present at the execution. The victim, a boy of great pluck, was little disturbed by this castigation, though it was very much more serious than most of the many floggings he had suffered before.

why then we must consider the matter later and see what can be done. (Cullingford 1998:45)

Physical punishment is a central tenet in the ethos of public schools of the time and it is used, not only to teach a lesson or punish, but also to ‘toughen up’ the little boys so they can accept pain. In Fletcher’s *Jefferson Junior*, the hero recalls his first experience of caning as having made him ‘execute a sort of impromptu war-dance. But I remember with pride that I did not squeal’ (cited in Cullingford 1998:45). It seems, furthermore, that the ability to stand a caning was also somehow a measure of one’s moral character. Consider, for example, the following extract from *His First Term* (Finnemore [1909] 1953:130):

Deliberately and heavily, Horner laid on six tremendous cuts. Nesbit was howling for mercy and writhing like an eel at the first blow.

“Look at that *sneak* Nesbit,” murmured Foulkes; “*can’t take his gruel like a man.*”

This was the general feeling throughout the dormitory, and Nesbit was looked upon with immense scorn as he crept back towards his bed. (my emphases)

Cullingford (1998:46) is of the opinion that the excitement of the school stories lies in the fact that the young are seen ‘trying to beat the system, and they get into scrapes, but within the security of school discipline. For even caning comes across as a symbol of security. It is part of the order of things’. In other words, the characters are often depicted as challenging the dominant discourses and their associated rules and practices by refusing to conform, but the miscreants are either severely punished for their efforts (which usually results in submission to the dominant discourses) or expelled from the school – the latter course temporarily protects the dominant discourses from further opposition.

3.3.5 The discourse of fighting

In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic’s*, one reads that ‘Wraysford was not a coward, and looked [...] ready to avenge his friend with hard knocks’ (Reed [1881] 1887:210). Reed thus clearly links courage with a willingness to fight, and this is why Oliver Greenfield redeems himself in the eyes of the Fifth Form only by finally challenging Loman to a fight:

It oozed out very soon that a fight was coming off, and instantly the school was in excitement [...] The Fifth were delighted. They knew their man could beat Loman any day of the week, and however much they had once doubted his courage, now it was known he was the challenger, every misgiving on that score was done away with. (Reed [1881] 1887:244)

The younger boys show even more delight at the prospect of a fight between two senior students, and they rush about excitedly, exclaiming, ‘A fight between Greenfield senior and a monitor! Oh it was too good to be true, a perfect luxury; something to be grateful for and no mistake!’ (Reed [1881] 1887:245). In Finnemore’s novels, the delight in this type of violence is unmistakable, especially when the narrative places the villain as the victim:

“Look at the Lubber!” cried one voice. “Somebody’s tapped his claret! Observe the rich colour and the profusion of the flow!”

“Isn’t he pretty?” cried another. “Old Lubber has donned his war-paint!”

“He’s been crying,” declared a third, “tears and blood mingled; tears because a chap half his size has been whopping him, and blood to show how well he was whopped!”

With a growl of anger, the big, clumsy fellow burst through the jeering crowd, and hurried away to hide his defeat and wash his face.

(Finnemore [1909] 1953:97)

Cullingford (1998:44) notes that ‘the almost formal nature of fights⁷³ which define both individual and group relationships gives a rhythm to the flow of these boys’ stories. They punctuate every significant action and climax’. Indeed, most fights are so formal that one often encounters passages similar to this one from *For the Sake of his Chum*: ‘Although he was not quite Matthews’ equal in size and

⁷³ Despite the formal, outwardly controlled nature of the fights, they were, nevertheless, extremely violent and potentially dangerous. For example, Bramhall (cited in Messiter 1907:14) recalls one of his worst fights at Repton thus:

Shore and myself were the heroes of a preconcerted and pitched battle of 57 minutes, my second being A. Holden, and Shore’s Roger Bass, brother of Michael, who knocked me clean over in the fight, because he thought I struck Shore unfairly. Shore had more science, but I was heavier, both 6 ft. Shore was three days a-bed after the fight, I was not fit to be seen.

weight, there was not sufficient difference between them to prohibit a fight in the *orthodox way*⁷⁴ (Rhoades 1909:230; my emphasis).

In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's*, as well as in the Teddy Lester series, the action at some point shifts to 'the place where the fights come off' (ironically, this is usually behind the chapel) and we are given a detailed description of the ensuing fight. Many authors relate the battles with obvious relish, referring to the 'fistic art' or the 'scientific pugilist' (Cullingford 1998:43). The Bat, for instance, in *Teddy Lester's Chums*, 'polished Gibson off in a very neat and scientific manner', whilst his friend, Ito, remains 'cool and steady and patient' during his encounter with Curzon.

The need to remain focused and scientific during a fight is emphasised by Rhoades (1909:230) in *For the Sake of his Chum*:

The theory of boxing is known to *most of the male sex*, but its application is difficult, especially when the temper is at white heat. The *natural instinct*, the round-arm swinging blow which, even if driven home, is not nearly so effective as the straight lunge with all the weight of the body behind it. (my emphases)

The boy readers of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* are encouraged⁷⁵ to learn to box well, because, in Hughes's opinion, 'there's no exercise in the world so good for the temper, and for the muscles of the back and legs'.⁷⁶ In addition, boxing as a disciplined sport is recognised as an excellent preparation for self-defence and therefore fulfils a dual purpose – 'to channel the boy's energies away from fighting but, at the same time, to make him ready to fight in earnest' (Bristow 1991:63). The Bat in *Teddy Lester's Chums*, for example, with all his physical

⁷⁴ Similarly, the following extract from *Confessions of an Etonian* states that 'in general, each battle at Eton is conducted with all the etiquette incidental to the prize-ring, under the latest regulations of the Birmingham Youth, or White-headed Bob. Indeed, one would here conclude that it was impossible to contend without a ring, seconds, and time-keeper' (M., I.E. 1846:27).

⁷⁵ Although the masters did not explicitly condone fighting, they are not often shown as interfering with controlled, prearranged fights. For example, Messiter (1907:44) recalls that at Repton, 'There were plenty of fights under the old elm trees in the playground: I remember Baker and Peile having a set to and the Headmaster passing and taking no notice, though he must have heard the cries of "Go it, Baker ! Go it, Peile!" Hannay was a great pugilist, though a little chap.'

⁷⁶ Hughes's recommendations could be seen as contributing to the physical production of the ideal, athletically competent, strong schoolboy discussed in Section 3.3.6.1.

disadvantages, is able to stand his ground against Gibson simply because he has been working hard at his 'sparring'.

Furthermore, the ability to fight also seems to be regarded as beneficial in transforming the boys into 'men of action'. In *Stalky and Co*, Kipling ([1899] 1994:70) criticises boys who 'jabber and jaw and burble, and that's about all you can do' by contrasting their behaviour with that of the boy heroes. These protagonists are not merely 'utterers of worn-out platitudes' and they are generally of the opinion that the way to do something for the honour of the school is not to prate about it, but to strike. Jimmy Karlake, in *For the Sake of his Chum*, adopts a similar approach: 'Before he could even speak, "the Catapult" had sprung at him. His left arm straightened, and with the weight of his body behind it, his fist met the chin of his foe' (Rhoades 1909:63).

According to Cullingford (1998:47), the ability to fight is not regarded as related to aggression, but as a way of 'not allowing others, however rough, to get the better of you. For this reason boxing was a sport much admired and developed in schools [...]. It was seen as a form not only of self-defence, but self-restraint'. In *The Boy's Own Paper* of 1914, a section entitled 'Boxing for Boys: The Art of Self-Defence' encourages youngsters to develop 'self-discipline – [...] a person can have no more valuable quality in life than that. A man who is master of himself is rich indeed' (cited in Cullingford 1998:47).

Hughes ([1857] 1971:232), in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, adds another dimension to the discourse of fighting by implying that it is morally edifying if it is done for the right reasons. He advises boys to

keep out of [fighting] if you can, by all means. When the time comes, if ever it should, that you have to say "Yes" or "No" to a challenge to fight, say "No" if you can – only take care to make it clear to yourself why you say "No". It's a proof of the highest courage, if done from true Christian motives. It's quite right and justifiable, if done from a simple aversion to physical pain and danger. But don't say "No" because you fear a licking, and say or think it's because you fear God, for that's neither Christian nor honest. And if you do fight, fight it out; and don't give in while you can stand and see.

Bristow (1991:63) is of the opinion that the physical abuse advocated in many of these books is a key component in the discourse of ‘muscular Christianity’ that was devised by the Christian Socialist movement as a means of ennobling violent acts. This became a very specific discourse in which fighting (in a good cause) was constructed as following on from a heroic mode, and especially so when the fighting was not the mere result of anger or an imposition of physical power. Cullingford (1998:43) adds to say that fighting is seen ‘not just as a means to an end but symbolic of some greater justice’. An excellent example of this discourse of fighting that claims to defend the good as such may be found in *For the Sake of his Chum*, where Lorden fights Matthews with the conviction that ‘every blow he struck was a vindication of [his friend] Karlake’s honour’ (Rhoades 1909:233).

Furthermore, the fighting that punctuates these books is deeply imbued with the ethos of the public school. The discourse of fighting that is promoted is generally not an *apologia* of fighting for fighting’s sake, but the discourse of fighting does present fighting as a *natural* way of sorting things out. ‘It is as if the fight were a part of a boy’s way of reasoning’ (Cullingford 1998:43), thus constituting what Foucault ([1972] 2003:46) calls a ‘regime of truth’ with its own ‘general politics’⁷⁷ of truth. In *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, Hughes ([1857] 1971:231) makes the following authorial comment:

Boys will quarrel and when they quarrel will sometimes fight. Fighting with fists is the natural and English way for English boys to settle their quarrels. What substitute is there, or ever was there amongst any nation under the sun? What would you like to see in its place?

After careful analysis of this extract, Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996:92) claim that a very strong ideological statement is being made through the ‘representation of the relationship between entities. *Fighting with fists* is being evaluated as the *natural* and *English* way. Lexical selection heightens this by the co-ordination of *natural* and *English*’. The passage can therefore be summarised thus:

⁷⁷ See Section 3.1 above.

Boys will quarrel. Boys will sometimes fight. English boys will fight with their fists. This is the *natural* way. This is the English way. No other nation can provide a substitute. (Knowles & Malmkjaer 1996:93; my emphasis)

The underlying discursive structure is clear: controlled fights are an acceptable, and even commendable, aspect of the phenomenon of public school life. In the following thoroughly dogmatic and uncompromising passage, Hughes illustrates just how deeply he himself has internalised this discourse of fighting that is translated into action (Hughes [1857]1971:218):

After all, what would life be without fighting, I should like to know? From the cradle to the grave, fighting, rightly understood, is the business, the real, highest, honestest [sic] business of every son of man. Every one who is worth his salt has his enemies; who must be beaten, be they evil thoughts and habits in himself, or *spiritual wickedness in high places*, or Russians, or Border-ruffians, or Bill, Tom, or Harry, who will not let him live his life in quiet till he has thrashed them. (my emphases)

What is particularly interesting here is Hughes's conscious and, indeed, almost seamless, conflation of his adopted dominant discourse of physical fighting with apparently substantiating references to a residual religious discourse that is, in fact, in direct opposition to his argument. In his eagerness to validate his standpoint on a residual level, Hughes refers loosely to Ephesians 6, a reference which, if carefully considered, completely undermines his attempt to spiritualise physical violence. The Scripture clearly states: ¹² For we wrestle *not* against flesh and blood, *but* against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this world, *against spiritual wickedness in high places*' (my emphases). While the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, contains many scriptures which could be interpreted as advocating a discourse of physical fighting, it is strange that Hughes should allude to this passage in the New Testament, which rejects violence 'against flesh and blood'. Nevertheless, this misrepresentation in the pioneer novel seems to have escaped the notice of the staunch defenders of schoolboy fights and they continued to feature as a central and definitive element of the narratives typical of the genre.

3.3.6 Discourses of manliness and honour

According to Cullingford (1998:46), whether it be in the willingness to fight or in the ability to take a caning, the books invariably encourage ‘manliness’. Although this quality is often invoked, it is seldom defined, simply because this idea is generally represented as an innate aspect of good character – yet another illustration of the ‘boys will be boys’ fallacy discussed in the introduction to Chapter Two. Nevertheless, ‘live clean, be straight, do your duty, and act the man’ became the maxim for many schoolboys who interpreted manliness as a subtle combination of compassion and ‘stiff upper lip’⁷⁸ (Cullingford 1998:46). According to Webb (2006:76), the discourse of manliness⁷⁹ propagated in traditional boys’ school stories is intertwined with ‘the values and ethos of British imperialism: patriotism, heroism, self-control,⁸⁰ self-sacrifice, a sense of duty, and what is morally right’.

⁷⁸ Although it is debatable whether this emotional reserve is meant to relate to British women as well, in a news article entitled ‘What stiff upper lip?’, Dowling (2008:1) relates that

[w]hen she appeared in a New York court on Monday, author JK Rowling invoked a time-honoured, if largely mythical, notion of British reserve. "I really don't want to cry," she said, "because I'm British." In this one utterance she managed to honour and breach the custom simultaneously. The whole point of the stiff upper lip is that you're not supposed to let on that you even feel like crying.

⁷⁹ The apparent ambiguity of the term ‘manly’ is comically emphasised by Bankes (1877:15), when he relates in utter exasperation:

I seem doomed to interruption this morning. The master now proceeds to make pointed remarks on our effeminacy in coming in [to school] in great coats. Now I do like this. Only the other morning he remarked that we were trying to be manly by not wearing great coats, and said how foolish we were! And now he must come down on us for having them on! Besides, I don't see why he is to direct the whole of his discourse at me in particular as he does, or at any rate seems to do, never taking his eye off me the whole time. I should like, yes I should like to give him a bit of my mind on the subject, but I daren't.

⁸⁰ Since public schoolboys were all but entirely separated from their fathers and other senior male relatives, they often modelled their images of ‘manliness’, or ideal British manhood, on the masters they felt lived up to the expectations of society. Dr Pears of Repton, for example, seems to have impressed at least one of the boys as a worthy role model. According to his account (cited in Messiter 1907:66), Dr Pears was

... an English scholar and gentleman, intent upon serious things. Everything about him was rigorously under control. There was something of the Stoic always near at hand. When I knew him his health was not good: he had lost the élan of youth, and his step was often rather weary; but he would never complain, and never give way. Never once throughout the whole of our intercourse did I see him lose his dignity; it was a natural dignity, strengthened by self-discipline, and leaving upon one the impression that it had been so strengthened: but it was not a pose.

In *For the Sake of his Chum*, the headmaster says that he had hoped ‘most sincerely that the culprit, whoever he is, would have had *sufficient manliness* to have admitted his fault and taken the punishment instead of allowing it to fall upon his fellows’ (Rhoades 1909:52; my emphasis). It follows, then, that honour and decency are closely associated with the ideals of manliness propagated by boys’ school stories and these form ‘the basis of the code of behaviour which binds all the boys together as members of a hierarchical society’ (Knowles & Malmkjaer 1996:10).

The concept of schoolboy honour is evidently very important, and the protagonists usually feel very strongly about it, so strongly, in fact, that this discourse and its construction of how an honourable schoolboy should behave gains coercive power. In *For the Sake of his Chum*, Jimmy’s father asks the judge to ‘have some sympathy with a point of schoolboy honour’ when the young boy refuses to betray his school friend, Lorden, before an open court (Rhoades 1909:304). In *The Fifth Form at St Dominic’s*, Reed ([1881] 1887:265) comments that

...it must be said of the Dominicans – and I think it may be said of a good many English public schoolboys besides – that, however foolish they may have been in other respects, however riotous, however jealous of one another, however well satisfied with themselves, a point of honour was a point which they all took seriously to heart.

The dominant discourse of schoolboy honour, furthermore, dictates that acceptable, honourable actions should be carried out in integrity and with singleness of heart. In one of his sermons preached at Marlborough College during his headmastership, Farrar articulates the residual discourses (drawn, not only from religious sources) that underscore the ideals of the dominant discourse of schoolboy honour and integrity (Farrar 1876:34):

Let us take words of falsehood first. In all ages, pagan no less than heathen, from the old poet who sang
“Who dares think one thing, and another tell,
My soul detests him as the gates of hell,”
down to the living one who explains “This is a shameful thing for men to lie”, the best and loftiest of mankind have ever been the most incisive in branding the sin of lies. There is something specially contemptible in the cowardice, the treachery,

the meanness of this sin; the trail of the serpent is peculiarly upon it; even men of the world are sickened by it. A man of honour could not tell a lie even if he would: in uttering it he would be unable to repress the rising gorge of self-disgust; the blush of his indignant honesty would burn through the smooth, false visage of deceit.

But though I trust that there are but very few of us who need to be warned against positive open lies, may we not all aim at more absolute and perfect accuracy? Aim never to colour any statement, however slight, by our interests or our wishes? Aim not only to speak the truth always, but always also the whole truth and nothing else?

When one considers that public schoolboys were obliged to listen, routinely, to sermons in which such residual discourses were *actively* and fervently *perpetuated* by cleric headmasters, it is not at all surprising that the dominant discourse of schoolboy honour which highly esteems integrity and the guiding principles of fair play forms a significant aspect of the representation and construction of boyhood in traditional boys' school stories.

3.3.6.1 *Physical attributes of the ideal British schoolboy*

In *Mobsley's Mohicans*, Harold Avery gently mocks the ideal schoolboy one encounters in books. Young Dean confesses:

Fraser was my beau-ideal of what a schoolboy ought to be; I felt sure that if he had lived in a book he would have fought the town roughs, bullied the bully, fallen in love with the headmaster's daughter, and rescued her from a fire which would have burned the premises. So perhaps, it comes about that Fraser *does* appear in a book, but how far short he falls of the regulation hero it will be for the reader to decide. (Avery 1909:5; Avery's emphasis)

In order to understand the specific prejudices and preferences of the dominant discourses that inform the perception of ideal British boyhood as portrayed through its fiction, it is useful to consider this ideal boy's physical characteristics. Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996:89) note that it is the 'stereotypic adolescent British boy' with 'his frank, open face who mattered in school fiction'. In *Ernest Bracebridge* (published in 1860), the author, W.H.G. Kingston, describes the protagonist as 'an active, well-built boy. [...] His mouth showed a good deal of

firmness, and he had clear honest eyes, with no little amount of humour in them' (cited in Knowles & Malmkjaer 1996:89).

Jimmy Karlake, the 'manly' hero in *For the Sake of his Chum*, is modelled along the same lines, with strength, fearlessness, and a sunny temper mixed in perfect proportion in an ultimately capable body:

He was a boy of average height, but built on *square, strong lines*. He was far from handsome, but *good humour* and lightness of heart seemed to play hide and seek in the twinkling eyes, in the expansive smile on his wide mouth and the hint of laughter in his voice. (Rhoades 1909:3; my emphases)

Similarly, Fraser in *Mobsley's Mohicans* is described as 'a sturdy, bright-faced boy of fourteen, of a very enterprising turn of mind, and blessed with elastic spirits which never seemed to fail' (Avery 1909:5). Furthermore, Russell, in Farrar's *Eric*, has 'a frank, open face, bright, intelligent, fearless eyes, and a very taking voice and manner'. From these examples it is evident that the authors of traditional boys' school stories are intent on depicting the discourses of courage and integrity not only through the hero's thoughts and actions, but also through his physical appearance of goodness and geniality.⁸¹

By way of contrast, however, the authors are significantly less complimentary in their presentation of villains and bullies. In fact, the descriptions are often so unpleasant that they leave the reader in no doubt about the character's moral blackness. For instance, Braddy in *The Fifth Form at St Dominic's* is a 'hulking, ugly youth', whilst Curzon in *Teddy Lester's Chums* is described as a 'big, thick-set, dark-faced boy'. Similarly, Harold Avery, in *Mobsley's Mohicans*, comes straight to the point and introduces Bowden as a 'cross-grained lout' (Avery 1909:5). Failure to meet the physical ideal is also often intended as a sign of an

⁸¹ Finnemore, however, seems to poke fun at the stereotypical appearance of boy heroes by introducing The Bat, who has a large, flat and pallid face, huge round spectacles, a dreadful squint and abnormally long arms that flap about when he runs. Despite the fact that he is 'a rum' un to look at', The Bat displays just as much courage and manliness as his friend, Teddy Lester, who is more representative of the norm.

inability to measure up to the ideal in other ways – in short, of an individual who lacks the virtues of honesty, courage and self-control.

Another aspect of the discourse of manliness propagated in books of this genre is an extreme admiration for physical strength and athleticism. It is thus not surprising that practically every hero in literature for boys is an outstanding sportsman. Tom Brown eventually becomes the captain of the school cricket team, Jimmy Karslake is nicknamed the ‘Catapult’ because of his physical suppleness and speed (Rhoades 1909:9), Teddy and Ito are incredible athletes, while The Bat can ‘sling down a yorker that would make your hair curl’ (Finnemore 1910:53).

This dominant discourse did not go unchallenged, however. An author in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1868, for example, with reference to the distinct emphasis on physical robustness, claimed that athleticism had brought about what he scathingly described as

...the low animal estimate of power, the callous unreceptive condition of mind, the coarse moral fibre, and semi-barbarous adulation of all that resembles physical force in man’s dealings with his fellow-creatures, which generations of Englishmen are thus annually carrying forward with them from the little world of school into the great school of the world. (cited in Bristow 1991:64)

Nevertheless, Bristow (1991:66) observes that ‘rational recreation’ (which requires mental as well as physical energy) was also believed to benefit every human faculty, and many were of the opinion that ‘fitness, above all, would strengthen the Empire. It would, implicitly, build up the physique and intellect of every civilized Briton, thereby surmounting differences of class’ (Bristow 1991:66). Thus, it may be argued that this schoolboy discourse of athleticism was propagated and informed by the hegemonic imperial discourses of the time.

In *The Loom of Youth* by Alec Waugh, Gordon (the boy hero) apparently ‘went to Fenhurst with the determination to excel, and at once was brought face to face with the fact that success lay in a blind worship at the shrine of the god of

Athleticism. [...] He who wished to get to the front has [sic] to strive after success on the field, and success on the field alone' (Bristow 1991:88). In his autobiographical account, C.S. Lewis ([1955]1991:70) recalls that 'the most important qualification' for acceptance into the elite sector of schoolboys called the 'Bloods' was 'athletic prowess'. This particular discourse also filters through Finnemore's works. In *His First Term* (1909), for example, absolutely no mention is made of the boys' academic capabilities. Instead, a detailed account is given of their physical exploits:

Teddy watched the scrum like a little tiger watching for prey. Suddenly he raised his hand and flicked his left ear. He had seen the ball working towards him. Tom understood the signal and placed himself at the right spot, and watched Teddy with keen anxiety. Then Teddy's lithe, nimble form plunged among the struggling legs as a swimmer plunges into waves. He reappeared with the ball in his grip, and at the next instant it was safe in Tom's hands, and that mighty sprinter was off like an arrow from a bow. (Finnemore [1909] 1953:94)

The obvious sensational tone of the above extract is remarkably representative of fictional accounts of similar events throughout the genre, with sporting endeavours often occupying much of the narrative. In much the same way, sport seems to have occupied much of the actual public schoolboy's time, for, as one old Etonian comments (M., I.E. 1846:42):

... I was, I think, far from being an idle boy. I neglected my studies, not to become listless and unemployed, but that I might earn more time for other, and, as most persons would think, less edifying pursuits, and was therefore invariably devoted to cricket, rowing, and football matches. This, then, was the good or ill effect which resulted from the chance of circumstance. My father had at once concluded, that send a boy to Eton, pay the yearly bills, and his education was infallibly insured.

It may be inferred from this extract that the overwhelming discourse of athleticism in public schools generally overshadowed (and, in some cases, all but entirely extinguished) the admiration for academic and cultural pursuits in the public schoolboy.

3.3.7 The significance of sporting matches

Given the extreme admiration for athleticism, it is hardly surprising that sport events should feature significantly in boy's school stories of the time. According to Jimmy Karlake, in *For the Sake of his Chum*, 'the struggles of Eton and Harrow, or even Rugby and Marlborough, have occupied a much larger space in the public eye; but so far as Honileigh School was concerned, these matches paled into insignificance before the momentous contest with Danbury College' (Rhoades 1909:22).

Indeed, it is not unusual to come across two consecutive chapters wholly dedicated to the description of a single game. The authors frequently use these chapters not only to provide a detailed, blow-by-blow account of the action, but also to give useful advice relevant to the game that is being played. In 'My First Football Match', which appeared in the first volume of *The Boys Own Paper* in 1879, Talbot Baines Reed slips in the following little piece of advice:

"Look here, Adams; you are to play 'half-back' you know. All you've got to take care of is to keep cool, and never let your eyes go off the ball. You know all the rest."

A lecture half an hour long could not have made more impression. I remembered those two hints, "Keep cool and watch the ball," as long as I played football, and I would advise every "half-back" to take them to heart in like manner. (Reed [1879] 2001:293)

Loyalty to one's captain and team is naturally an essential part of good sportsmanship and it is usually when the hero has unquestioningly followed his captain's advice that he manages to bring victory for his team. By contrast, when Curzon (in *Teddy Lester's Chums*) takes offence at Tom Sandys's advice and betrays his team by dropping every catch that comes his way, his actions are described as low, base and cowardly.

I mentioned earlier that the discourse of athleticism may be seen as complementary to the hegemonic imperial discourse of the time. Ang (2000:87) reaches the same conclusion from another perspective, suggesting that, during

the nineteenth century, group sports were encouraged because of their ability to instil team spirit, 'an inspiration that was to be sublimated towards the building and establishment of empire. The connection is one that is easy to make: the rugby match [...] sports many combat metaphors'. In one of the many descriptions of rugby matches to be found in the Teddy Lester series, for example, the chapter entitled, 'The Battle with Hunter's' opens with Tom Sandys, the captain, 'marshalling' his forces. The subsequent chapter tells the reader 'How the second half was fought'. The following extract from *Tom Brown's Schooldays* also clearly illustrates the relationship that the author perceives between contact sports and war:

You say, you don't see much in it all; nothing but a struggling mass of boys, and a leather ball, which seems to excite them all to great fury, as a red rag does a bull. My dear sir, a battle would look much the same to you, except that the boys would be men, and the balls iron.... (Hughes [1857] 1971:89)

In *Mobsley's Mohicans*, Harold Avery (1909) uses similar war metaphors to describe an informal cricket match played with an umbrella and a rolled-up pair of stockings on the top landing of the dormitory. The result is a hilarious parody, and it is evident that Avery has consciously set out to undermine the stereotypical imagery relished by mainstream authors:

We had evidently "gone under", yet Fraser did not think so, but seized the umbrella with an air of determination, and walked up to the wicket like Napoleon's Old Guard marching forward with rolling drums and flying colours to retrieve the fortunes of the day. (Avery 1909:6)

Later in the book, when the long-awaited football match in Carlsham Park turns into a messy skirmish with the town 'roughs', the boys reminisce that

the coming of the Park-keeper was like the timely arrival of the Prussians at Waterloo: but the determined, aggressive movement of Mobsley with his toothache medicine resembled the advance of the English line: it had already broken the enemy, and we could therefore claim that we had won the day.
(Avery 1909:187)

Such blatantly ridiculous similes certainly shed a different light on passages such as the following from 'My First Football Match' (from the *Boy's Own Paper*) by

Talbot Baines Reed ([1879]2001). Not only is the significance of the football match ludicrously exaggerated, but the inner sentiments of a soldier in action are severely trivialized:

An officer in the Crimean War once described his sensation in some of the battles there as precisely similar to those he had experienced when a boy on the football field at Rugby. I can appreciate the comparison, for one. Certainly never soldier went into action with a more solemn do-or-die feeling than that with which I took my place on the field that afternoon. (Reed [1879] 2001:293)

Despite the obvious hyperbole, however, the discourse of sporting matches as preparation for the greater conflict of life outside the school (particularly in the service of the Empire), as well as the war metaphors frequently used in the fictional descriptions of these matches, is typical of the vast majority of traditional boys' school stories. Moreover, such depictions highlight the relationship between certain dominant public school discourses and some of the imperial discourses of the time.

3.3.8 The discourse of identity – the individual and the group

According to Ang (2000:85), placing the protagonist in the world of school, where the student is the measure of things, forces him to stand on his own feet and encourages the formation of identity and character. He must make and stand by his decisions and beliefs or run the risk of being labelled 'a nothing'.⁸² As Hughes ([1857] 1971:133) claims, in 'no place in the world has individual character more weight than at a public school'.

Nevertheless, this realisation of personal identity is complicated by the strong group ethic that is so celebrated at these institutions. Part of the public school ethos is to encourage the boys to think of themselves 'in terms of membership within a larger entity, whether of the cricket or rugby teams, school house, school, university, or nation' (Ang 2000:84). The preface to *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, taken from a *Rugby Magazine*, draws attention to the fact that the

⁸² Like Wood, the 'moon-faced nonentity' in *Mobsley's Mohicans* (Avery 1909:6).

boys 'form a complete social body ... a society, in which, by the nature of the case, we must not only learn, but act and live; and act and live not only as boys, but as boys who will be men' (cited in Honey 1977:19).

Loyalty to this group ethic is often so strongly emphasised by a discourse that promotes conformity that the preservation of self becomes unimportant when weighed against the preservation and glory of the group (Ang 2000:85). For example, we are not meant to view Tom Brown as a completely unique individual, but rather as a representative of decent English boys. In fact, his father also subscribes to the group ethic when he concludes that all he wants from Tom's schooling is that he should 'turn out a brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishman, and a gentleman, and a Christian' (Hughes [1857] 1971:66).

Furthermore, Ang (2000:88) claims that very often in these books, the identity of the boy is 'bound up with that of the nation, his personal development marching side by side with the development of empire'. In other words, the good qualities of the protagonists are inextricably linked to their national heritage or greater group identity. In *Teddy Lester's Chums*, Finnemore (1910:52) describes, in the following manner, the attitudes of the three friends, Teddy, Ito and The Bat, as they face the dangerous floodwaters:

And now, at this moment of most awful peril, [...] the best qualities of the two allied races came out in the two young Britons and the Jap who had to face death. They faced it calmly, and chatted quietly [...].

Avery takes a similar stance in *Mobsley's Mohicans* when he, in effect, equates the boys' Englishness with their readiness to admit shared responsibility and culpability:

Fraser obeyed the order. He would readily have borne all the blame if we had let him; but his comrades were English boys, though they may have only played cricket with a solid bat in a gravel yard, and with one accord they likewise rose to their feet. (Avery 1909:187)

The purportedly unmistakable character traits attributed to the protagonists by the discourse of shared national identity filters through most historical texts in this

genre, although Ang (2000:98) claims that the First World War ‘eroded the sense of a group idea’, causing the subsequent emergence of a more ‘isolated and occasionally alienated consciousness’.

Nevertheless, traditional boys’ school stories generally affirm that a boy’s success at public school is practically guaranteed if he displays a willingness to conform to the perceived group identity and if he has ‘nothing odd about him’ (Hughes [1857] 1971:79). Conformation to and acceptance of the dominant discourses advocated by the public school thus form the bases of the colonisation of the boy in the context of his school and his acceptance in society on the grounds of that colonisation.

3.4 SATIRICAL DISCOURSE SUBVERSION: THE CASE OF BILLY BUNTER

No discussion of boys’ public school stories would be complete without special reference to Billy Bunter of Greyfriars. This inimitable character achieved notoriety as ‘The Fat Owl of the Remove’ in the boys’ weeklies published between 1908 and 1940 in the *Magnet*.⁸³ Kiberd (2004:60) describes Bunter as ‘a truly mythical comic creation to rival those of Dickens’. In *Boys’ Weeklies*, George Orwell (1939:6) claims that Bunter’s ‘tight trousers against which boots and canes are constantly thudding, his astuteness in search of food, his postal order which never turns up, have made him famous wherever the Union Jack waves’. The readership of this weekly was indeed widespread, captivating not only public and private school boys, but also those whom one might consider immune to typical public school glamour.⁸⁴

⁸³ The *Magnet* ceased publication in 1940 due to paper shortages and the exorbitant cost of printing during wartime. Hamilton published a few Bunter books subsequent to the war and lived to see Bunter’s transition into a favourite comic strip character (Carpenter & Prichard 1995:63).

⁸⁴ To illustrate this, Orwell (1939:5) states, ‘I have seen a young coal miner, for instance, a lad who had already worked a year or two underground eagerly reading the *Gem*’ [sister paper to the *Magnet*, also featuring school stories written by Charles Hamilton].

According to Kiberd (2004:58), the Billy Bunter stories contain examples of all possible types of public schoolboy, from the dependable, brave and honourable Harry Wharton, to the incurable Bounder of the Remove, Vernon-Smith, who is apparently addicted to the public house and betting shop. Over and above these, one encounters an obese boy who may, in all fairness, be called an anti-hero. 'In a sense, Bunter was the supreme caricature who, by his extremity and grossness, allowed the normal to define itself as such, but who also allowed the normal to become the heroic: he became a walking or rolling advertisement of the virtues of self-discipline, English restraint, modesty, honesty and sheer pluck' (Kiberd 2004:60).

Kiberd's assertions allow for an interesting analysis of the innovative use made by Charles Hamilton (alias Frank Richards)⁸⁵ of the subversion of dominant discourse as a writing tool. In effect, Billy Bunter's representation of non-conformist discourses serves not only to highlight, but also to strengthen the position of dominant discourses. For example, the value of telling the truth (as propagated by the dominant discourse of schoolboy honour and integrity) is emphasised by the embarrassing contradictions Bunter utters in his attempts to cover up for his insatiable appetite and his dreadful habit of pilfering food:⁸⁶

"It – It's a bit much picking on me," gasped Bunter. "I wouldn't touch anyone's cake. Not my way. Crikey! I never knew you'd got a fruit cake. I just called in for a chat about the hols –"

"Who had it then?" demanded Frank, edging round the table.

Bunter backed away. "How should I know?" he howled. "You must have eaten it, same as you did the bits that had gone. It wasn't there when I ate it, I tell you. No, not that. When I didn't eat it. Anyway, you hadn't left much. There were only a few rotten old bits – not that I saw it." (Richards 1983a:15)

⁸⁵ Hamilton is referred to as Richards for the remainder of this section since this is the *nom de plume* under which his works were published.

⁸⁶ The softer version of this is sometimes referred to as 'foraging', a practice that consisted in sending one's fag out to find food. When Bankes (1877:74), for example, finds himself short of victuals, he concludes that 'the only thing to be done is to dispatch my fag with a plate and milk-jug to forage. [...] He returns in about five minutes. Really, he is getting quite sharp; he has secured six rolls and a plate full of ends of butter, which he has systematically cut off everybody's order all round the house.

Such ludicrous passages are juxtaposed against the inherent integrity of the honest boys who do their best to 'save Bunter from himself'. Passages like the following are not uncommon:

"Spill the beans," advised Bob.

"That's right," said Frank. "Tell the truth."

"You might even enjoy it," added Harry.

"And it will be a new experience," remarked Hurree.

"Beasts!" said the Owl, and bowled dismally away. (Richards 1983d:53)

Kiberd (2004:60) suggests that Billy Bunter's self-indulgence is like that of 'an unsocialised infant who lacked a basic sense of right or wrong [...] That is why people could forgive him – for only an arrant fool could ever be taken in by his clumsy acts of self interest. And those acts bring out the best in those all around him – they become norms for the definition of true heroism'. Furthermore, in *Frank Richards: The Chap behind the Chums*, Mary Cadogan (cited in Kiberd 2004:61) calls Bunter a schoolboy Falstaff, suggesting that our sense of comic justice for clowns is appeased by the fact that Bunter always comes out ahead in some way or another. Although this may be seen as a subversion of the dominant discourses, Bunter's reprehensible behaviour is usually exposed in humiliating (and often violent) episodes that serve to reinforce the dominant discursive structures. Consider, for example, the following passage which occurs shortly after the boys of Study No.1 realise that Bunter has 'scoffed' an entire cake which they had been saving for tea:

"Scrag him!" shouted Frank.

"Let's boot him up and down the passage!"

"No! Stoppit! I bet you jolly well had it – whoops! Ouch! Yarooo!"

Yelling, he bolted outside. Frank and Harry only just got the tips of their shoes to his trousers, but howls of anguish floated up and down the passage. There was one spot of consolation for him, however. As he scooted downstairs, he was comforted by the thought that he was, at least, taking the cake with him. (Richards 1983a:16)

Kiberd (2004:58) also points out that Bunter presents a perfect incarnation of Aristotle's definition of theatrical comedy – 'a fool incapable of change or reform who delights us by repeating the same set of mistakes many times over'. The unchangeable nature of Bunter's follies is reflected in the entire world of Greyfriars, where little happens to disturb the routine of daily life. The main characters never leave the Remove and in this respect one may say that their scholastic development is as stunted as Bunter's personal development. Nothing ever changes.

This characteristic of Richard's stories has been cited by many as one of the reasons for their popularity. Although the weeklies were published almost continually during the first fifty years of the twentieth century (a period by no means uneventful in England) the imaginary world of Greyfriars remained basically the same, with no disturbing intrusions into the lives of the characters. Implicit in this aspect of the stories is the discourse which views the school as a physical and emotional sanctuary – a world unto itself – that is secure in its idealised microcosmic status. George Orwell (1939:8) describes it thus:

The year is 1910 – or 1940, but it is all the same. You are at Greyfriars, a rosy-cheeked boy of fourteen in posh tailor-made clothes, sitting down to tea in your study on the Remove passage after an exciting game of football which was won by an odd goal in the last half-minute. There is a cosy fire in the study, and outside the wind is whistling. The ivy clusters thickly around the old grey stones. The King is on his throne and the pound is worth a pound. Over in Europe the comic foreigners are jabbering and gesticulating, but the grim, grey battleships of the British fleet are steaming up the Channel and at the outposts of Empire the monocled Englishmen are holding the niggers at bay. Lord Mauleverer has just got another fiver and we are all settling down to a tremendous tea of sausages, sardines, crumpets, potted meet, jam and doughnuts. After tea we shall sit round the study fire having a good laugh at Billy Bunter and discussing the team for next week's match against Rook-wood. Everything is safe, solid and unquestionable. Everything will be the same for ever and ever. That approximately is the atmosphere.

As may be inferred from this extract, the Billy Bunter series also contains a kind of snob appeal which Orwell (1939:4) describes as 'completely shameless'. The names of titled boys are constantly repeated and the reader is frequently reminded that Lord Mauleverer has a 'little place' called Mauleverer Towers, that

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh is the Nabob of Bhanipur and that Vernon-Smith's father is a millionaire. Along with this comes an inevitable and, it must be added, 'perfectly deliberate incitement to wealth-fantasy' (Orwell 1939:4). A definitive example of this appears in *Billy Bunter's Benefit* (Richards 1983c:143) in which a few boys arrange a theatrical performance to help Bunter settle his debts:

"Watcher!" shouted Bob, as Lord Mauleverer appeared in the doorway. "If you want the best seats, you've come to the right place."

"How much do you want to pay, Mauly?" asked Harry. "We've got tickets for two pounds, one pound, and fifty pence, and there are a few left at twenty pence."

"Sold any for two pounds?"

"A few. There hasn't actually been a stampede for them."

"Just as well," said Mauly. "I want five. I'm going to ask Squiff and some others."

There was a stunned silence, and then Harry picked up the note that Mauly had dropped on the table.

"Thanks," he said.

"Only too pleased. Lookin' forward to it. Nothing like helping Bunter to save him from himself."

The discourse of classism is self-evident in such passages, and the reality that Billy Bunter actually does not belong in the same category as his peers adds to the irony of his snobbish pretences. He frequently boasts of the magnificence of Bunter Court and his father's luxurious vehicles: 'My father changes his car every year. He reckons that getting a new Rolls is an economy really' (Richards 1983a:49), but we are informed that his home is actually a 'common villa', and that his father's only car is an ageing sedan. Such circumstances cause Kiberd (2004:61) to claim that Bunter, in effect, becomes 'a comic-object version of the fantasy of an upper-class life'.

Although Richards takes evident enjoyment in describing the grossness of Bunter's weakness of character, Orwell (1939:4) points out that the weeklies always display a very distinct temperance strain – 'the good boys are good in the clean-living English tradition – they keep in hard training, wash behind their ears, never hit below the belt' (Orwell 1939:3). Despite this discourse of temperance – or perhaps because of it – drinking (and by association, smoking) although

clearly labelled as rather disgraceful, is nevertheless presented with kind of irresistible fascination. Consider, for example, the following extract in which Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of the Remove, who numbers amongst the most popular characters with readers, is caught smoking for the umpteenth time:

Smithy pulled open the table drawer and fished out a cigarette and matches. Staring defiantly at Redwing, he lit up. He knew that Redwing hated to see him smoking and he seldom did it while his friend was there, but now he blew a cloud of smoke towards him.

“Put it out!” Reddy said, sharply.

“Clear out if you don’t like it.”

“I will.”

As Redwing got up, the Bounder deliberately blew another stream of smoke in his direction. At the same moment, there was a sharp tap on the door, and it was pushed open.

“Hell’s bells!” gasped Smithy, as the tall, angular figure of Mr Quelch, his form master, appeared.

“Vernon-Smith, I asked Bunter – ”

Hastily, the Bounder whipped the cigarette from his mouth, but it was too late. There was the glowing cigarette, a spiral of smoke rising in the air.

(Richards 1983b:10)

While smoking is clearly forbidden, Smithy is nonetheless portrayed as deriving an almost profane satisfaction from engaging in this activity. Hence, the fascination lingers. Furthermore, its disgrace is considerably softened by the fact that Smithy is generally well-liked and held in high regard as one of the best soccer players in the form.

As is evident from this extract, and the subsequent events which depict Smithy as suffering only very fleetingly from the ensuing punishment, one notices that Richards does not employ a didactic tone in his work, except when lamenting Bunter’s irredeemable character. Indeed, this may be regarded as one of the most endearing aspects of Richards’s style. As Kiberd (2004:61) puts it: ‘He never condescends to the reader but rather to the character of Bunter, who allows every reader to feel wholly superior’. In this respect, the following passage is adequately representative:

There was no escape for Bunter. He was booked for a whole hour of English literature: a subject on [sic] which the Owl of the Remove took no interest whatever. 'Gray's Elegy' was the order of the day ... really it was an excellent poem: and there were fellows, even in the Lower Fourth, who could appreciate its beauties. But William George Bunter was not one of those fellows. Bunter would have given the Completed Poetical Works of Thomas Gray for a cake, and thrown in those of William Shakespeare as a makeweight and considered that he had got the best of the bargain. (Richards cited in Kiberd 2004:61)

It is evident from this discussion that, unlike some other unconventional boys' school stories, the Billy Bunter series, while presenting potentially subversive and alternative discourses, nevertheless succeeds in reaffirming and propagating the dominant discourses through satire, which can only operate by contrasting undesirable behaviour with an implicitly idealised dominant discourse of proper behaviour. This approach inevitably relies on the premise that the conventional discourses are so dominant that the reader's expectations expose the 'unacceptable' behaviour of the protagonist. Furthermore, while satire generally assumes a certain amount of 'pre-knowledge' on the part of the reader, this potential problem is solved for the uninitiated child reader through clear representations of dominant discourses through the other characters.

3.5 CONCLUSION

"I have now been at Slapton a whole term, and I have learned how true were the words of my old tutor when he was giving me advice upon life at a big public school: 'There is only one thing to say to you, lto,' were his words, 'and that is, "Play the game, and play it straight." There's the whole thing in a nutshell.'"
(Finnemore [1909] 1953:217)

Earlier in this chapter, I referred to Foucault's assertion that '[e]ach society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true' (Foucault [1972] 2003:46). Within the closed community of the public school, this observation is particularly valid. In fact, Hughes's comments in this respect reflect similar convictions to those proposed by Foucault. Hughes ([1857] 1971:134) asserts that

[e]very school has [...] its own traditionary standard of right and wrong, which cannot be transgressed with impunity, marking certain things as low and

blackguard, and certain others as lawful and right. This standard is ever varying, though it changes only slowly, and little by little.

This 'traditional standard', which one may also refer to as the school ethos, determines the nature of the dominant discourse(s) which function(s) within this microcosm of society 'as true'. These discourses, in turn, determine the nature of the recurrent motifs, or formulaic elements which feature within the boys' public school story, and their inclusion and exclusion in such stories in a context which may potentially preserve, silence or alter such discourses.

The collective effect of these dominant discourses on the protagonist represents the particular construction of boyhood made possible within a given school setting. In the case of traditional boys' public school stories, this construction culminates in the representation of the ideal British schoolboy, whose characteristics are easily identified because of the overwhelming prevalence of the dominant discourses within the genre. Smith (1996:345) summarises the salient features as follows:

The ideal schoolboy was to be a manly boy: he was to follow a rigid code of honour that included not snitching on other boys, never backing down from a fight, and never giving in to his feelings or emotions. The ideal boy was brave, tough, and full of pluck.

Furthermore, Bristow (1991:58) views this construction as an attempt to combine the admirable characteristics of the 'proper gentleman (fair play, team spirit, decorum)' with a strong sense of 'the values of competition, independence, and a wilful strength of mind'.

While such constructions are made possible by the boys' public school ethos, Hughes's ([1857] 1971:134) suggestion that 'this standard is ever varying' is similar in some ways to Foucault's ideas concerning the displacement of dominant discourses.⁸⁷ Such displacement would, inevitably, alter the

⁸⁷ See Section 2.2.

construction of boyhood facilitated by these literal and fictional institutions. In Hughes's opinion, it is

...the leading boys for the time being who give the tone to all the rest, and make the school either a noble institution for the training of Christian Englishmen, or a place where a young boy will get more evil than he would if he were turned out to make his way in London streets, or anything between those two extremes.

(Hughes [1857] 1971:134)

Thus, in order to prevent the displacement of the dominant discourses which he considers ideal, and to ensure the future circulation and reproduction of the same, Hughes ([1857] 1971:133) encourages 'all you boys who are getting into the upper forms' to '[q]uit yourselves like men then; speak up, and strike out if necessary for whatsoever is true, and manly, and lovely, and of good report; never try to be popular, but only to do your duty and help others to do theirs'.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, discourse theory would suggest that the alteration or complete displacement of dominant discourses is not only achieved from within the microcosm, but also from without. As Foucault points out, discourses do not exist in a vacuum, but are in constant conflict with other, emergent discourses and the social practices which inform them over questions of truth and authority (Mills 2004:17).⁸⁹ The passing of time, along with the global and social changes it inevitably brings, would, therefore, inexorably affect the discourses which inform the fictional representation and construction of boyhood in the context of school, as discussed in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

⁸⁸ Similarly, Nevill's desire to see the hegemonic discourses of his *alma mater* successfully transmitted to future generations of public school boys is expressed thus (Nevill 1911:329): 'May those yet to come continue to bear the torch of Eton, handed down from distant generations, bravely aloft, whilst never ceasing to keep before their eyes the duty of delivering it to their successors, its flame bright and brilliant as of old.'

⁸⁹ See Section 2.3.

CHAPTER FOUR

MUGGLE CONSTRUCTIONS OF HARRY POTTER'S MAGICAL BOYHOOD

"It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities"
– Albus Dumbledore
(Rowling 1998:245)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Whenever I come across someone who is reading the Harry Potter series for the very first time, I am distinctly envious. To journey, uninitiated, into the magical world of Hogwarts, so vividly and masterfully described by J.K. Rowling, without any idea of what to expect, without any knowledge of the unique characters one will meet or of the unexpected twists of fate in store, is an experience that I would gladly relive. Even after multiple readings and countless analyses of the texts, the novels still hold an indefinable charm for me, the characters become almost tangible and Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry remains one of my favourite places for magical escapism.

In *Reading Harry Potter*, Karen Manners Smith (2003:70) claims that the Harry Potter books 'fit squarely into a *school story tradition* that stretches back to *Tom Brown's Schooldays*' (my emphasis), an observation which, in itself, accounts for the inclusion of the series in this study. Her opinion is shared by many critics who have noted the similarities between the typical boys' public school⁹⁰ celebrated in British literature and the fictional, magical institution known as Hogwarts. However, Eccleshare (2002:37) suggests that it is Rowling's ability to

⁹⁰ In view of the fact that Hogwarts is a co-educational institution and that some main characters are girls (notably Hermione Granger, a protagonist), a comparative study of certain aspects of the Harry Potter books with traditional girls' school stories may be productive. However, because of the specific scope and historically comparative methodology of the study, such elements, as well as the possible effects of the inclusion of girls in the public school story, are only noted here and are not investigated in any detail.

successfully and imaginatively bind together strands from different genres that gives her work more universal appeal. In a similar vein, Charles Elster (2003:201) claims that ‘children and adults can read the books on various levels: as adventure, sports story, school story, fantasy story set in a parallel, magical world, heroic tale or psychological mystery’.

In *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels*, Eccleshare (2002:37) claims that *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* is ‘clearly a school story’ and expresses her belief that Rowling thoroughly understands ‘the scope offered by a school setting and makes excellent use of it’. During an interview in March 1999, Rowling herself commented on the allure which fictional boarding schools hold for child readers:

No child wants to lose their parents, yet the idea of being removed from the expectations of parents is alluring. There is something liberating, too, about being transported into the kind of surrogate family which boarding school represents, where the relationships are less intense and the boundaries perhaps more clearly defined. (cited in Manners Smith 2003:69)

Rowling’s comments suggest an awareness of the genre she is working in and would lead one to believe that whatever similarities or discrepancies there may be between the traditional school story and her works, these are indeed consciously presented as such, and are not merely the result of the workings of plot or character development.

Charles Elster (2003:209) suggests that the Harry Potter books present a ‘depiction – and to some extent, satire – of English boarding school life’. His claim that Rowling’s work is satirical in nature is significant in a study of discourses on boyhood in school stories, as it suggests an intentional deviation from previously accepted norms.⁹¹ It is the traditional, yet somewhat subversive, aspect of Rowling’s books that is of particular interest in this chapter.

⁹¹ The dominant discourses and norms characteristic of historical boys’ school stories have been discussed in Chapter Three of this study, and form a benchmark against which to assess the variations and similarities included in the Harry Potter series. Note that elements discussed as typical in Chapter Three are not discussed in the same order in this chapter.

By comparing the discourses presented in the Harry Potter series with those presented in historical boys' school stories (particularly those by Thomas Hughes, John Finnemore and Rudyard Kipling), one can identify the discourses which Rowling has deliberately undermined, as well as those motifs and associated discourses which she has chosen to include, and thus, to some extent, perpetuate, through her work.

Given that Hogwarts is a school of wizardry, one significant difference immediately draws a distinction between it and its fictional public school predecessors. There is magic – an exuberant abundance of it. Not only does the entire curriculum turn on magic, but every aspect of the protagonists' lives is affected by it. To some extent, this qualifies Pat Pinsent's (2002:28) comment in *The Education of a Wizard* that, as school stories, the Harry Potter books 'take the genre to the extreme edge'; indeed, it is Rowling's tendency to take certain traditional school motifs and discourses and develop them beyond the conventional boundaries that is of particular significance in this chapter.

4.2 PRESENTATIONS OF HOGWARTS AS A SETTING

According to Eccleshare (2002:51), 'Hogwarts is now firmly established in the literary landscape. It lies at the heart of the imaginary world, complete with its own landscape, weather system and ecology, and provides the secure underpinning of the stories'. In Section 3.1.2, I discussed the significance of loyalty towards and affection for the school as a physical setting and it is from this perspective that Rowling's presentation of Hogwarts is compared with descriptions of other fictional (and real) schools.

4.2.1 The motif of institutional grandeur

Most public schools presented in boys' fiction have been situated in vast, visually impressive buildings set amidst sprawling, well-tended sport fields. Indeed, Tom

Brown's first impression as he drives up towards his new school is quite typical (Hughes [1857] 1971:77):

Tom's heart beat quick as he passed the great school field, or close, with its noble elms, in which several games at football were going on, and tried to take in at once the long line of grey buildings, beginning with the chapel, and ending with the school-house, the residence of the head-master, where the great flag was lazily waving from the highest round tower. And he began already to be proud of being a Rugby boy.

Harry's experience largely mirrors that of Tom as the anticipation builds up prior to his first sight of Hogwarts in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (Rowling 1997:83):

Harry's stomach lurched with nerves and Ron, he saw, looked pale under his freckles. [...]

"Yeh'll get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec," Hagrid called over his shoulder, "jus' round this bend here."

There was a loud "Ooooooh!"

The narrow path had opened suddenly on to the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers.⁹²

Although Hogwarts has an undeniably fairy-tale quality about it, its ancient aspect calls to mind a sense of long-established traditions just as strong as those represented by the impressive buildings of Rugby. Moreover, Hogwarts forms the pivot of the entire Harry Potter series, just as Rugby symbolises the centre of Tom Brown's universe.⁹³ The pivotal situation of Hogwarts in the narrative is reemphasised in the last novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007): even though Harry does not formally return to the school for what would have been his seventh and final year, his eventual triumph over the forces of evil embodied in Voldemort takes place on the familiar ground of the Great Hall at Hogwarts, where he is surrounded by his fellow students and erstwhile teachers.

⁹² Eccleshare (2002:38) is of the opinion that 'physically, with its dramatic setting and castle-like appearance, Hogwarts owes much to the cliff-top Roslyn in Dean Farrar's classic *Eric, or Little by Little* (1858), as well as to Blyton's altogether jollier *Malory Towers* stories.'

⁹³ The pivotal importance (emotional, psychological and physical) of the school for historical public schoolboys is discussed in Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2.

Furthermore, Eccleshare (2002:49) notes that, for the protagonists, Hogwarts provides ‘a physical and emotional sanctuary. Returning to Hogwarts at the beginning of every school year is a relief to Harry after the emotional turmoil of the Dursleys’ home and it allows for admission into a safe world predicated on old-fashioned values’.

Such attachment to a school building is certainly not unprecedented. In a certain sense, the locale forms a tangible embodiment of everything that the school experience represents for each student. Thus, Harry Potter’s experience is analogous to that of generations of fictional schoolboys. The following excerpt, for example, sums up Teddy Lester’s appreciation for his school grounds (from *Three School Chums*, Finnemore [1908] 1953:182):

“There’s old Slapton!” said Teddy as they caught a glimpse of the school buildings crowning a distant slope. “Good old Slapton! We’ve had some fun there, and next term will be none the worse for not running against Baldwin and his man Dowse about our house. [...]”

The two boys watched in silence as a fold of hillside hid the school and heathland they loved so well, and then their thoughts ranged forward to the pleasures awaiting them.

For Teddy, his school experience revolves mainly around the good times to be had and the preservation of personal integrity and fair play. All these aspects are alluded to as he looks at the school buildings which he links emotionally with the experience itself.

In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Harry faces possible expulsion from Hogwarts because of his having used ‘under-age magic’ in front of a Muggle (non-magic person) in a life-threatening situation during the holidays. When, after a stressful Ministry of Magic hearing, Harry finds himself standing on ‘Platform Nine and Three-Quarters’ ready to board the Hogwarts Express, his thoughts clearly testify to his emotional links with the school (Rowling 2003:165): ‘[T]he Hogwarts Express stood belching sooty steam over a platform packed with departing students and their families. Harry inhaled the familiar smell and felt his spirits soar ...he was really going back.’

Another telling excerpt from *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* shows just how emotionally dependent on Hogwarts Harry has become (Rowling 1999:74): ‘Harry climbed the spiral staircase with no thought in his head except how glad he was to be back. They reached their familiar, circular dormitory with its five four-poster beds and Harry, looking around, felt he was home at last.’ Furthermore, in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007:558), Harry comes to the realisation that ‘he was home. Hogwarts was the first and best home he had known. He and Voldemort and Snape, the abandoned boys, had all found home here ...’. Rowling links the names of these three characters on the basis of their love of their school, but this link also highlights the idea that though people may share a common background, and even a common affection, it is their respective – and contrasting – choices that determine the direction their lives take. The significance of personal agency is a discourse which permeates the entire series in a variety of contexts, and one which is discussed at considerable length in subsequent sections.

Harry’s attachment to Hogwarts does not diminish as the series progresses, and Rowling actually uses it to great effect in the last book to ease the tension created during the intense scene in which Harry defeats Voldemort. After establishing Harry as a hero of epic proportions, she ends the chapter with this slightly anomalous reminder of his physical and emotional vulnerability and humanness (Rowling 2007:600):

“That wand’s more trouble than it’s worth,” said Harry.

“And quite honestly,” he turned away from the painted portraits, thinking now only of the four-poster bed lying waiting for him in Gryffindor Tower, and wondering whether Kreacher might bring him a sandwich there, “I’ve had enough trouble for a lifetime.”

4.2.2 The motif of the school as microcosm

On a slightly different, but related level, Rowling’s decision to situate the most significant episodes in the series at Hogwarts shows an extension of another motif prevalent in historical boys’ school stories: that of the perception of the

school as a world complete in itself.⁹⁴ As David Steege (2002:145) notes, the public school experience is often described as one in which ‘the outside world is far less important than the microcosm of the institution. While at school, the outside world largely drops away and the hero can concentrate on his own exploits and development’.

The physical location of the school also seems to enhance the psychological isolation of this microcosm. For example, Rugby is described to Tom Brown by the coachman as being a ‘Werry out-o’-the-way place, [...] off the main road you see’ (Hughes [1857] 1971:71). Just as the pupils of Hogwarts take the Hogwarts Express, in traditional stories such as those by John Finnemore and Talbot Baines Reed, the boys of Slapton and St Dominic’s, for example, generally travel back and forth by train because of the considerable distance between their homes and the respective schools. In the case of Hogwarts, this isolation from the outside world is considerably increased by some of the details Rowling includes. Not only is the school situated in some unspecified location in the north of England and generally accessed only by the students via the Hogwarts Express, but it is bewitched in such a way that ‘if a Muggle looks at it, all they see is a mouldering old ruin with a sign over the entrance saying DANGER, DO NOT ENTER, UNSAFE’ (Rowling 2000:148). Furthermore, the castle has been made magically ‘unplottable’ so that no one (Wizard or Muggle) can find it unless the person is shown where it is by one in authority.

The special mode of transport required to take the students to and from school also serves to set them apart from the outside world and identify them as legitimate and privileged members of this microcosm. Station scenes such as the following are quite characteristic of most boys’ school stories (Finnemore [1909] 1953:182):

Two days later, a sharp frosty December morning saw Oakford Station packed with crowds of Slapton boys. They swarmed all over the place, and littered it with heaps of bags, of portmanteaux, of travelling-rugs, of magazines with vivid

⁹⁴ The microcosmic nature of traditional boys’ public schools is also highlighted in Section 3.1.2.

Christmas pictures on the covers, of travelling impedimenta of every description. They whistled, shouted, laughed, sang, yelled farewells to each other.

By comparing this excerpt with the next one, from *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, one can see how little Rowling has deviated from the norm. Nevertheless, those small, seemingly insignificant details in which she does deviate are possibly the means whereby she captures and holds the reader's attention (Rowling 1997:71):

Smoke from the engine drifted over the heads of the chattering crowd, while *cats of every colour* wound here and there between their legs. *Owls hooted* to each other in a disgruntled sort of way over the babble and the scraping of heavy trunks. The first few carriages were already packed with students, some hanging out of the window to talk to their families, some fighting over seats. (my emphases)

From this extract it is evident that Rowling's subtle inclusion of owls and cats into the description of an otherwise typical scene succeeds in highlighting the magical overtones of the narrative. The owls are also significant in that they facilitate communication as mail-bearers between Hogwarts and the outside world.

Despite the general depiction of Hogwarts as a self-sufficient and largely independent microcosm, Rowling adds another dimension to this concept by describing the negative impact an intrusion can have on the efficient functioning of the school. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the unwelcome interference of the 'toad-like' Professor Umbridge (the Ministry of Magic representative who assumes the role of 'Hogwarts High Inquisitor') in the management of the institution and its subjects causes dissension and rebellion at all levels. Hermione's agitated and far-sighted response to Professor Umbridge's unexpected, though 'illuminating' speech at the beginning of Harry's fifth year at Hogwarts reflects the anger and apprehension felt by most of the students and teachers regarding the Ministry's intimidating interference (Rowling 2003:193):

"There was some important stuff hidden in the waffle," said Hermione grimly. [...]
"How about: 'progress for progress's sake must be discouraged'? How about: 'pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited'?"
"Well, what does that mean?" said Ron impatiently.

“I’ll tell you what it means,” said Hermione through gritted teeth. “It means the Ministry’s interfering at Hogwarts.”

The threat posed by this interference has implications that jeopardise the independence and academic freedom of Hogwarts, a discourse which is staunchly promoted by Dumbledore as headmaster. On several occasions, one witnesses Dumbledore intentionally (and often justifiably) overriding the authority of the Ministry of Magic. In a particularly heated exchange in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Cornelius Fudge, the Minister for Magic, warns Dumbledore of his intention to undermine the relative sovereignty of the school (Rowling 2000:615):

“Now see here, Dumbledore,” [Fudge] said, waving a threatening finger. “I’ve given you *free rein*, always. I’ve had a lot of respect for you. I might not have agreed with some of your decisions, but I’ve kept quiet. There aren’t many who’d have let you hire werewolves, or keep Hagrid, or *decide what to teach your students, without reference to the Ministry*. [...] I don’t know what *you and your staff* are playing at Dumbledore, but I have heard enough. I have no more to add. I will be in touch with you tomorrow, Dumbledore, to discuss the running of this school.” (my emphases)

The appointment of Dolores Umbridge at Hogwarts is part of Fudge’s plan to destroy the school’s autonomy. What follows in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* is an exasperating series of Educational Decrees that place the Ministry of Magic in a position to control almost every aspect of school government.

One of the most disturbing examples of Umbridge’s interference with the school’s disciplinary traditions may be found in the episode in which she makes Harry ‘do some lines’ for her. The apparent innocence, yet actual cruelty of this form of punishment seems to mirror her duplicitous personality. Instead of providing Harry (who does not in fact deserve any punishment at all) with the ink usually required for the task, Umbridge – who shows evident sadistic enjoyment of Harry’s suffering – makes him write (or carve) ‘*I must not tell lies*’ on the back of his hand with his own blood, using a bewitched quill. As this is the only form of corporal punishment inflicted on the students by any of the Hogwarts teachers before the Death Eaters assume authority in the final book, it serves to highlight Rowling’s deviation from the historical school story norm that regards certain

forms of corporal punishment as acceptable and, indeed, necessary. The only permanent Hogwarts staff member who expresses a desire for the reinstatement of corporal punishment at Hogwarts is Filch, the unpopular caretaker, who says to Harry (Rowling 2003:554):

“I’ve been telling Dumbledore for years and years he’s too soft with you all. [...] You filthy little beasts would never have dropped Stink Pellets if you’d known I had it in my power to *whip you raw*, would you, now? Nobody would have thought of throwing Fanged Frisbees down the corridors if I could’ve *strung you up by the ankles* in my office, would they? But when Educational Decree Number Twenty-nine comes in, Potter, I’ll be allowed to do them things...” (my emphases)

While Filch’s reasons for desiring such severe measures are explored later in this chapter, I wish, at this point, to draw attention to the types of corporal punishment Filch would like to see reinstated. Stringing errant students up by the ankles sounds dreadfully reminiscent of disciplinary measures which may have prevailed during the Dark Ages; whipping them raw, however, brings to mind some of the many instances of severe flogging which took place routinely in boys’ public schools. In *Tom Brown’s Universe*, for example, Honey (1977:198) cites a purportedly true description of corporal punishment practices in a particular school:

In the middle of the room was a large box draped in black cloth, and in austere tones the culprit was told to take down his trousers and kneel before the block over which [the two head boys] held him down. The swishing was given with the master’s full strength and it took only two or three strokes for drops of blood to form everywhere and it continued for 15 to 20 strokes when the wretched boy’s bottom was a mass of blood. Generally, of course, the boys endured it with fortitude but sometimes there were scenes of screaming, howling and struggling which made me sick with disgust.

This description sounds every bit as savage as Filch’s sadistic desire to whip the students raw, the awful difference being, of course, that the former was a very real experience for some unfortunate schoolboys in eminent schools. Consequently, Filch’s cruel discourse of corporal punishment is perhaps not as ludicrously far-fetched as it initially seems, in that it coincides, in some ways, with common practices in certain educational institutions.

Moreover, that Rowling wishes to subvert the discourse which approves of corporal punishment is implicit in the association of this discourse with the vindictive and unprincipled Carrow siblings who become teachers at Hogwarts after Snape's appointment as headmaster. When Harry returns to Hogwarts in the last book, some of the students are described as physically injured as a result of new school policies regarding discipline, but Rowling does not specify the exact reason for or specific source of these injuries. Neville Longbottom's 'battered visage' bears testament, however, to the unspecified atrocities of the Carrow regime (Rowling 2007:462):

"But they've used you as a knife sharpener," said Ron, wincing slightly as they passed a lamp and Neville's injuries were thrown into even greater relief. Neville shrugged. "Doesn't matter. They don't want to spill too much pure blood, so they'll torture us a bit if we're mouthy but they won't actually kill us." Harry did not know what was worse, the things Neville was saying or the matter-of-fact way in which he said them.

Neville's non-committal, almost resigned response bothers Harry in a way that is perhaps similar to the bewildered incredulity I feel whenever I encounter non-judgemental, even humorous, Old Boy accounts of vicious administrations of corporal punishment in school. Resignation to and possible internalisation of the discourse that advocates corporal punishment is required by the school system as part of the colonisation of the boy – a process which, in turn, promotes and perpetuates the discourse. In the case described above, however, the Carrow administration is relatively short-lived and thus corporal punishment appears, not as a definitive aspect of the Hogwarts experience, but as the direct result of external interference at the school, and its context implies Rowling's rejection of a discourse which supports the use of corporal punishment.

The most devastating violation of the school's microcosmic status occurs in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, when Voldemort, the metaphorical embodiment of evil, and his army of Death Eaters enter the Hogwarts grounds. In the ensuing episodes, one witnesses the school – which was previously depicted as a kind of emotional and physical sanctuary for the students – being transformed into a

battleground, the eventual combat zone where pain, murder and loss abound, the site of 'The Battle of Hogwarts' (Rowling 2007:489). The following extract conveys the tragic extent of this intrusion of the outside world on the Hogwarts microcosm (Rowling 2007:556):

Neville leaned against the doorframe [of the main entrance to Hogwarts] for a moment and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. He looked like an old man. Then he set off down the steps again into the darkness to recover more bodies. Harry took one glance back at the entrance of the Great Hall. People were moving around, trying to comfort each other, drinking, kneeling beside the dead ...

Such utter devastation is unprecedented in historical school stories, but in the concluding chapter of the Harry Potter series, Rowling restores Hogwarts to its former independence and glory. Not only does the departure of Harry's two sons on the Hogwarts Express to go to school signify a return to the original portrayal of the isolation and autonomy of the school, but his reflection that his scar 'had not pained Harry for nineteen years' (Rowling 2007:607) implies that no external intrusions of evil will disrupt his sons' school experience. This consideration, above all, causes Harry to conclude that all is well⁹⁵ (Rowling 2007:607).

4.2.3 Hogwarts as a 'meritocracy' – addressing classist discourses

During the decade which saw the publication of the Harry Potter series (1997 – 2007), political correctness achieved what I venture to call dominant discourse status in certain parts of the Western world. Because of this increased awareness, Rowling's books have been scrutinised by critics for evidence of classism, racism or any other discriminatory discourses which might filter through the texts.

Rowling seems to have anticipated such scrutiny. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, for instance, Angelina Johnson is described as 'a tall black girl with long braided hair' (Rowling 2003:202). This self-confident, pleasant leader is

⁹⁵ Rowling (2007:607) concludes the entire series with these three words: 'All was well'.

just one of several characters created by Rowling that, as Glover (2003:40) puts it, 'are in line with the varied racial make-up of modern Britain'. The inclusion of other characters such as the possibly Indian Patil twins, who are described by Dean Thomas as 'the best looking girls in the year' (Rowling 2000:358), and the attractive, probably Chinese, Cho Chang add to the multi-racial representation of Hogwarts. Glover (2003:41) asserts that in this respect, Rowling's approach proves that she 'does not simply accept the value system of the traditional school story, which projected the upper-class white male as the norm (and as superior)'.

Furthermore, Rowling commented during an interview that 'Hogwarts school is a meritocracy. Magic comes from every walk of life. It doesn't say anywhere that they pay fees' (cited in Glover 2003:41). Glover (2003:41) expands on this argument by pointing out that, in its inclusion of 'anyone with magical ability, Hogwarts is unlike the genre's normal schools: in the traditional school story pupils from the "lower classes" were often excluded because a certain level of wealth was necessary in order to afford the fees'. Moreover, Natov (2002:133) states that there are many indications 'of Rowling's abhorrence of the class system, its divisiveness, and the negative potential of specialness'; and cites the contemptuous portrayal of the wealthy Malfoy, as well as Harry's decision to become friends with the significantly less well-off Ron Weasley and the Muggle-born Hermione as evidence.

Rowling's inclusion of different, arguably 'sub-human' characters (including werewolves, house elves and goblins, for instance) into the narrative also allows for the exploration of class discrimination against the 'other'. While Hermione's campaign for the liberation of house elves shows an awareness, on Hermione's part at least, of the injustice of their social marginalisation, the other characters are slow to follow her lead. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry breaks away from the typical wizard prejudice against house elves when he decides to physically (non-magically) dig Dobby's grave, thereby showing his respect and affection for the faithful creature. That his actions are regarded as peculiar in the magical world is implied by a remark by Griphook, the goblin (Rowling 2007:393):

“You’re an unusual wizard, Harry Potter.”

“In what way?” asked Harry, rubbing his scar absently.

“You dug the grave.”

“So?” [...]

“You also rescued a goblin.”

Harry’s allegedly unusual behaviour may be seen as stemming from the principles of an emergent discourse of class equality which is promoted by Hermione throughout the series.

While the perception of Rowling’s class sensitivity may be valid in terms of these considerations, other aspects of the narrative would, however, suggest otherwise. Although it may be argued that Rowling subverts discourses of class consciousness in the traditional sense (typical of historical boys’ school stories), she nevertheless seems to portray an alternative grid for class discrimination.

Heilman and Gregory (2003:242) claim that ‘in the *Harry Potter* books, Rowling has created an ideological world presenting privileged insiders and outcast outsiders across a wide range of signifiers.⁹⁶ These include gender, [...] social class, peer group affiliations, race, culture and nationality’. In fact, Blake (cited in Gupta 2003:125) claims that Rowling’s approach is, in essence, still strikingly reminiscent of the traditional British class system:

Inheritance is explored at Hogwarts in another, very English, way – the stories feature class differences and snobberies. Not all children at Hogwarts are social equals, and neither are their parents (which is one reason why this is not *just* another school story). Many people have noticed that the school houses map on to the class system, with the worthy workers (Hufflepuff), the brave, stolidly reliable lower middle class (Gryffindor), and the professional and intellectual middle class (Ravenclaw). At the top of the tree [...] we have Slytherin, where we find the wicked aristocrats, those stock baddies of the public school stories.

⁹⁶ Throughout the series, Harry is depicted as a character whose popularity with the student body oscillates between two extremes. As Heilman and Gregory (2003:249) point out, we frequently see Harry move from ‘privileged insider to outcast outsider’. This may be argued to be partially on account of his ambiguous social status. Although his celebrated survival of Voldemort’s first attack on him as a child singles him out as unique and possibly ‘chosen’, his position as the orphaned son of a Muggle-born mother may be seen as contributing, at times, to his occasional social marginalisation.

Furthermore, Skulnick and Goodman (2003:263) assert that Hogwarts is a school in which ‘classes are clearly distinguished and many take it for granted that those with greater capital (money or knowledge) are better human beings than those without these assets’. This view is particularly useful in that it suggests an alternative measure than of that of monetary wealth as the determining factor in terms of class discrimination. However, instead of pursuing the concept of an unspecified form of ‘intellectual’ wealth as a basis for class prejudice, one may argue that the possession of a very specific ‘asset’ is responsible for the most discriminatory aspect of Hogwarts, the asset of ‘magic’.⁹⁷

While Rowling may dispute the accusations of class bias in the student intake policy of Hogwarts by claiming that ‘[m]agic comes from every walk of life’ (cited in Glover 2003:41), this very statement suggests the determining factor of a kind of discrimination that supersedes the consideration of wealth and social status. If you do not inherently possess the ability to perform magic, you are not welcome as a student at Hogwarts. As Steege (2002:154) notes, ‘[i]nstead of glorifying things British, at least in any overt way, Hogwarts glorifies instead the culture of magic and those *elite* who have magical powers’ (my emphasis). Not only does this bias exclude all Muggles from eligibility, but its implementation can occasionally lead to the preferment of one member of a family above his/her non-magical sibling.

Perhaps the most poignant example of the result of this kind of discrimination lies in the estrangement of Harry’s mother, Lily, from her sister, Petunia. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, it becomes apparent that Petunia actually wrote to Dumbledore asking to be accepted as a student at Hogwarts along with her sister (Rowling 2007:537). The inevitable (though kindly phrased) rejection of her application ultimately leads to the development of an impassable rift between the sisters that is characterised by prejudice on both sides, and explicit bitterness and implied hatred on the part of the ostracised Petunia. In essence, therefore,

⁹⁷ Argus Filch’s marginalised social status as a ‘Squib’ is discussed in Section 4.4 of this chapter.

Hogwarts symbolises the embodiment and circulation of an alternative but equally prejudiced discourse of discrimination which – though admittedly not traditional in terms of school stories – may, nonetheless, be ultimately detrimental in its effect.

Thus, while Rowling’s description of Hogwarts as a meritocracy may be valid, it does not necessarily follow that its discursive substructure is classless. In fact, the concept of classless meritocracy is called into question by the effects of meritocracy in Harry Potter’s world. Although the social status of young witches and wizards is determined largely by magical ability and talent and not by wealth or descent, students who do not possess the ability to perform magic, such as Squibs and Muggles, are completely marginalised by the system, with no hope of social advancement. Because magic is an inborn attribute that cannot be learned or acquired by intelligence, and can only be enhanced but not created by perseverance or diligent application, the selection policy of the school excludes a class of socially disempowered students in much the same way that other discourses of class discrimination determine that only a ‘charmed circle’ of privileged boys gain access to a public school education. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry may well be described as a meritocracy, but classless it certainly is not.

4.3 ELEMENTS AFFECTING THE PRESENTATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF CHARACTERS

4.3.1 Fighting and the misuse of power

According to Steege (2002:153), Rowling deliberately softens what Steege terms ‘the darker side of public school life’. He clarifies his meaning by noting that throughout the novels there is no allusion to the system of fagging or any description of the victimisation of small or new students. Indeed, the forbearance Harry shows the little Creevey brothers – who constantly follow him, lost in abject, but sincere, hero-worship of Harry – is, to say the least, admirable. At no

point in the series does Harry attempt to exploit the influence he holds over them, and, in fact, he is sometimes described as taking longer routes between classes in order to avoid Colin Creevey and his camera. Harry's sensitivity to Colin's feelings and his evident reluctance to send the little nuisance away do him credit, and it is therefore with a clear conscience that Harry can mourn the death of Colin, who is described finally as 'tiny in death' (Rowling 2007:556).

While there may be no fagging or cruel initiations at the school, Eccleshare (2002:50) notes that bullying is common at Hogwarts, as at any other school. Although this victimisation is not directed specifically towards younger students, a considerable amount of conflict arises within each hierarchical level of the school. There are several displays of the misuse of power by corrupt prefects against students in the same year, the main perpetrator being Draco Malfoy, a wealthy, snobbish Slytherin, who marks Harry out as his enemy even before the Sorting Ceremony in the first year.

Consider, for instance, the following extract from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling 2003:551):

"The Inquisitorial Squad, Granger," said Malfoy, pointing towards a tiny silver "1" on his robes just beneath his prefect's badge. "A select group of students who are supportive of the Ministry of Magic, hand-picked by Professor Umbridge. Anyway, members of the Inquisitorial Squad *do* have the power to dock points ... so, Granger, I'll have five from you for being rude about our new Headmistress. Macmillan, five for contradicting me. Five because I don't like you Potter. Weasley, your shirt's untucked so I'll have another five for that. Oh yeah, I forgot, you're a Mudblood, Granger, so ten off for that."

Malfoy's speech is clearly intended to strike the reader as an example of a gross miscarriage of justice – and so it is. His treatment of Hermione, in particular, would actually, in non-magic terms, amount to hate speech and racial discrimination based on her parentage. Eccleshare (2002:39) comments that in the novels, rivalries such as that between Harry and Malfoy 'play an important role in highlighting the moral high ground occupied by the heroes; the good instincts and actions are reinforced by being thwarted and despised by others'.

Her assertion certainly holds true for the first three novels, which were in print at the time of her study.

However, in subsequent publications, Rowling does not leave Gryffindor prefects entirely stainless in their positions of authority. Percy Weasley represents the stereotypical, over-studious (and conceited) Head Boy who conducts himself at all times with an exaggerated amount of decorum and respect, but his younger brother, Ron Weasley, views his responsibilities in a much more casual light. Not only does he occasionally contravene the rules of the school, but he is not above a degree of corruption. For example, shortly after Hermione has confiscated a banned 'Fanged Frisbee' from a fourth-year, Ron grabs it from her saying, 'Excellent, I've always wanted one of these' (Rowling 2005:164). Hermione's remonstrance seems to fall on deaf ears, and the reader never discovers the eventual outcome of the incident. Hermione too, succumbs to temptation and casts a 'confunding' charm on McLaggen so that Ron can be chosen for the Quidditch team. This time it is Harry, now Captain of Quidditch, who questions her behaviour (Rowling 2005:219): "But wasn't that dishonest,⁹⁸ Hermione? I mean, you're a prefect, aren't you?"

By including incidents such as these, Rowling succeeds in making her characters not only more believable, but also more accessible to her readers. We are led to despise 'perfect Percy's' bigheaded self-righteousness and question his moral integrity, especially in the fifth and sixth novels, in which he turns his back on what he seems to consider his less worthy family. In Percy's case, it would seem that Rowling is suggesting that too high an opinion of one's own morality leads one to view one's fellow beings as inherently inferior. This is perhaps the evil that she is anxious to avoid by presenting the main characters as vulnerable and, at times, culpable. In so doing, she thus represents a distinctly human construction of childhood which her readers may well be able to identify with.

⁹⁸ Discourses of honesty and integrity in the Harry Potter series are discussed in Section 4.3.2.

In questioning why Rowling (unlike the authors of most traditional school stories) does not deem imperative the portrayal of consistently honest protagonists, it is useful to consider a statement the author made during an interview in 2007. With reference to the defining quality of Gryffindor House, Rowling said, “The virtue that I prize among all others (and I think it is obvious from the books) is courage.”⁹⁹ While this is indeed obvious from the books, Rowling’s comment also implies that she values the other virtues (such as honesty and self-control) less highly, a circumstance which would perhaps account for her willingness to depict the protagonists as arguably flawed in these areas. As long as the protagonists conform to a purportedly desirable discourse of courage, other weaknesses may be excused.

A discussion of the misuse and abuse of power in the context of school would be incomplete without reference to bullying. At Hogwarts, bullying usually takes the form of verbal abuse, which sometimes culminates in actual fighting. It is perhaps ironic that one of the harshest representations of bullying should portray Harry’s father, James Potter, as guilty of cruel and unjust harassment of the young Severus Snape. Although Harry bears Snape no affection, he is deeply troubled by his father’s actions and he begins to appreciate more fully the mutual dislike that existed between his potions master and his late father. This questioning of a parent’s virtue is in itself a shift away from discourse of parental infallibility and adult power, in line with Rowling’s deconstruction of the notion that adults create a safe space for the child.

Far removed from the Muggle world where adroit use of one’s fists can offer protection against bodily harm, fighting at Hogwarts tends to be a much more dangerous affair, with the possible risk of powerful curses being used. The following excerpt is a prime example of Malfoy’s rude remarks to Hermione which elicit an incensed response from Harry (Rowling 2000:261):

⁹⁹ This interview can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=LfMs5INMfi0.

“Want one, Granger?” said Malfoy, holding out a badge to Hermione. “I’ve got loads. But don’t touch my hand, now. I’ve just washed it you see, don’t want a Mudblood sliming it up.”

Some of the anger Harry had been feeling for days and days seemed to burst through a dam in his chest. [...]

For a split second, they looked into each other’s eyes, then, at exactly the same time, both acted.

“Furnunculus!” Harry yelled.

“Densaugeo!” screamed Malfoy.

Jets of light shot from both wands, hit each other in mid-air and ricocheted off at angles – Harry’s hit Goyle in the face, and Malfoy’s hit Hermione.

Not only are the risks to the opponents greatly increased in this kind of fight, but the onlookers evidently also put themselves at risk by remaining in the vicinity. This no doubt explains why some students scramble out of the way and hurry away down corridors when a duel becomes apparent. Such reactions are vastly different from those found in traditional boys’ school stories, in which eager anticipation characterises the responses of curious onlookers at a falling-out.

Nevertheless, in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Rowling includes an episode in which both Harry and George Weasley resort to what Professor McGonagall scathingly terms ‘an exhibition of Muggle duelling’ (Rowling 2003:367). It is evident from the teacher’s derisive remarks that she despises their actions and considers them injurious to the students’ dignity as wizards.

Earlier in the same novel, Rowling relates that Dudley, Harry’s ‘vast’ Muggle cousin, has discovered his talent in ‘the noble sport’, and has lately become the ‘Junior Heavyweight Interschool Boxing Champion of the Southeast’ (Rowling 2003:15). Humour is evident in the further reflection that, although Harry was ‘not remotely afraid of his cousin any more, [...] he still didn’t think that Dudley learning to punch harder and more accurately was cause for celebration’ (Rowling 2003:15). Debunking the dignity of the sport of boxing itself while not denying the physical power that it gives its proponents, Rowling is shifting away from traditional discourses about both fighting and boxing.

While ‘Muggle duelling’ may be considered barbaric by some of Rowling’s characters, nowhere in traditional boys’ school stories would one witness the serious injury which results from the ‘scrap’ between Harry and Malfoy in the penultimate novel. In this disturbing scene, we see Harry behaving both irresponsibly and indiscriminately. The uncontrolled anger and ensuing violence of their responses reflect badly on both parties, and even more so on Harry, who is himself shocked by the effect of his spell (Rowling 2005:489):

There was a loud bang and the bin behind Harry exploded; Harry attempted a Leg-Locker Curse that backfired off the wall behind Malfoy’s ear and smashed the cistern beneath Moaning Myrtle, who screamed loudly; water poured everywhere and Harry slipped over as Malfoy, his face contorted, cried, “Cruci—”

“SECTUMSEMPRA!” bellowed Harry from the floor, waving his wand wildly.

Blood spurted from Malfoy’s face and chest as though he had been slashed through with an invisible sword. He staggered backwards and collapsed on to the waterlogged floor with a great splash, his wand falling from his limp right hand.

“No – ” gasped Harry. [...]

Harry did not know what he was saying; he fell to his knees beside Malfoy, who was shaking uncontrollably in a pool of his own blood. Moaning Myrtle let out a deafening scream.

“MURDER! MURDER IN THE BATHROOM! MURDER!”

What is perhaps most distressing about the scene is the fact that, although Rowling describes Harry as ‘horrified by what he had done’ (Rowling 2005:490), the full impact of Harry’s wild actions (which, had Snape not arrived on the scene so quickly, would indeed have constituted murder) is soon forgotten in the sweeping series of subsequent events.¹⁰⁰ Although Malfoy is guilty of attempting an Unforgivable Curse against Harry, his actions are not as irresponsible as Harry’s use of a dangerous curse he knows nothing about. There is, furthermore, no comment, authorial or otherwise, regarding the lack of self-control displayed by both students in this encounter, which in itself constitutes the contravention of

¹⁰⁰ Just hours after this incident, Ginny defends Harry’s actions against Hermione’s level-headed criticism. This causes tension between the friends; ‘Harry, however, though he knew he little deserved it, felt unbelievably cheerful all of a sudden’ (Rowling 2005:496).

a code which is central to the dominant discourse of fighting in traditional boys' school stories.¹⁰¹

4.3.2 The discourse of integrity and moral courage

In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the Squire summarises his dreams for Tom on the eve of his son's departure for Rugby: 'If he'll only turn out a brave, truth-telling Englishman, and a gentleman, and a Christian, that's all I want' (Hughes [1857] 1971:66). This comment, to a large extent, encapsulates the ethical code which characterises most traditional boys' school stories which have appeared since the publication of the above sentiment. From Hughes's text, it can be inferred that a boy's courage is inextricably linked to his ability to tell the truth under all circumstances.

The characterisation of Harry is ambiguous in this respect. Although he belongs to Gryffindor – in itself a token of his inherent bravery¹⁰² – Harry frequently succumbs to the temptation of lying in order to extricate himself from awkward situations. In this respect, it seems that Harry is occasionally unable to make the morally correct decision when confronted with (as Dumbledore puts it) a choice between 'what is right and what is easy' (Rowling 2000:724). One might not find it strange that Harry should lie in order to protect someone else – as he does when he is interrogated by Professor Umbridge concerning the whereabouts of Sirius Black – but that he should be seen lying in order to save his skin in petty situations presents a departure from the discourse on honesty that is the norm in traditional school stories.¹⁰³ For example, in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*,

¹⁰¹ In *The Boy's Own Paper* of 1914, a section entitled 'Boxing for Boys: The Art of Self-Defence' encourages youngsters to develop 'self-discipline – [...] a person can have no more valuable quality in life than that. A man who is master of himself is rich indeed' (cited in Cullingford 1998:47). See Section 3.3.5.

¹⁰² According to the Sorting Hat (Rowling 1997:88):

*You might belong in Gryffindor,
Where dwell the brave at heart,
Their daring, nerve and chivalry
Set Gryffindors apart;...*

¹⁰³ The standard upheld by historical boys' school stories may be summed up as follows (Farrar 1876:35):

Hermione asks Harry whether he has made any progress with the clue for the second task of the Triwizard Tournament (Rowling 2000:385):

“Oh, I – I reckon I’ve got a pretty good idea what it’s about now,” Harry lied.

“Have you really?” said Hermione, looking impressed. “Well done!”

Harry’s insides gave a guilty squirm, but he ignored them.

Harry chooses to lie to Hermione in order to justify his decision to go into Hogsmeade for the day; there is no loyalty or moral conviction involved in his action, merely self-interest. One is relieved that at least he feels a twinge of his conscience, but even this consolation is stripped away when he tells the same lie only a few hours later to Hagrid. This time there is no mention of guilt, merely the cryptic observation that ‘lying to Hagrid wasn’t quite like lying to anyone else’¹⁰⁴ (Rowling 2000:396).

Nor does Harry seem to outgrow this tendency. One of the most blatant lies he tells appears in the penultimate novel, in which he concocts a hardly credible cock-and-bull story for Professor Snape in order to protect himself from (possibly deserved) public exposure and ridicule. Professor Snape possesses significant deductive powers and, considering the circumstances, none but the most subjective readers would argue the validity of his accusations: “Do you know what I think, Potter?” said Snape, very quietly. “I think that you are a liar and a cheat and that you deserve detention with me every Saturday until the end of term” (Rowling 2005:494).

That the protagonist of the entire series should be even vaguely deserving of such observations presents a complete departure from the dominant discourse of integrity so prevalent in traditional boys’ school stories and adds considerable

... never pretend to be doing what you are not doing; never pretend to have done what you have not done; never be surprised into a concealment or startled into a falsehood; such “manslaughter on truth” always ends in murder. Excuse develops into subterfuge; subterfuge degenerates into equivocation; equivocation ends in lies.

Discourses of honesty and integrity were discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.3.6.

¹⁰⁴ It may be argued that Harry is, in fact, ashamed of his lack of progress with the clue and therefore lies to hide his embarrassment. Nevertheless, even if this were the case, a lie told in order to conceal one’s inadequacy also constitutes a departure from the ‘honour bright’ norm.

complexity to the representation of Harry's moral strength. This is especially true in view of the fact that throughout the series, Harry is, in general, shown as representative of that which is good, a concept which, in turn, also signifies truth.

Nevertheless, as Dumbledore enigmatically observes, the truth "is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution" (Rowling 1997:216). Dumbledore's philosophy of treating 'truth' with 'caution' coincides, in some ways, with Foucault's theory that truth is not an autonomous entity, but rather a construct determined by dominant discourses of truth and authority. Instead of attempting to define 'truth' as such, Foucault is more concerned with trying to discover 'how this *choice of truth*, inside which we are caught but which we ceaselessly renew, was *made*' (Foucault [1970] 1981:70; my emphases).

Dumbledore's cryptic remark, although it is made early in the series, acquires darker significance when one considers the comment Aberforth Dumbledore makes concerning the late headmaster in the final book: 'I knew my brother, Potter. He learned secrecy at our mother's knee. Secrets and lies, that's how we grew up, and Albus ... he was a natural' (Rowling 2007:453). Although Harry wishes with all his heart that he could say that Albus Dumbledore had always been entirely honest with him, he finds that he cannot. Harry's pent-up frustration and pain in this regard are conveyed in the following passage from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (Rowling 2007:295):

[Harry] flung his arms over his head, hardly knowing whether he was trying to hold in his anger or protect himself from the weight of his own disillusionment. "Look at what he [Dumbledore] asked from me, Hermione! Risk your life, Harry! And again! And again! And don't expect me to explain everything, just trust me blindly, trust that I know what I'm doing, trust me even though I don't trust you! *Never the whole truth!* Never!" [...]

"He loved you," Hermione whispered. "I know he loved you."

Harry dropped his arms. "I don't know who he loved, Hermione, but it was never me. This isn't love, the mess he's left me in. He shared a damn sight more of *what he was really thinking* with Gellert Grindelwald than he ever shared with me." (my emphases)

Nevertheless, as one discovers in the penultimate chapter of the final book, Dumbledore's intention was to withhold crucial information until such time as Harry would be emotionally able to deal with it and use it 'for the greater good' (Rowling 2007:293). The worthy end is, therefore, Dumbledore's probable justification for arguably duplicitous means. Nonetheless, as even the most subtle forms of duplicity are condemned by the dominant discourses of honesty and integrity propagated by traditional boys' school stories, Dumbledore's mysterious and often questionable¹⁰⁵ behaviour is distinctly subversive, especially considering his self-appointed role as Harry's mentor.

Nevertheless, even when Harry realises that Dumbledore always knew that the final defeat of Voldemort (in itself a desirable objective) would ultimately require Harry's death, Harry considers 'Dumbledore's betrayal' as 'almost nothing' in view of the 'bigger plan' (Rowling 2007:555). In fact, he marvels at Dumbledore's foresight: 'How *neat*, how *elegant*, not to waste any more lives, but to give the dangerous task to the boy who had already been *marked for slaughter*, and whose death would not be a calamity, but another blow against Voldemort' (Rowling 2007:555; my emphases). The *truth* of Harry's destiny is indeed 'a beautiful and terrible thing'.¹⁰⁶

4.3.3 The motif of loyalty to one's house

According to Steege (2002:145), central features of public schools can be identified within the microcosm of Hogwarts, perhaps the most obvious being the house system, where unswerving loyalty to one's house is paramount. He draws attention to the centrality of house affiliation in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in which Hughes ([1857] 1971:147) poses the following rhetorical question: 'Would you, any of you, give a fig for a fellow who didn't believe in, and stand up for, his own house and his own school?'

¹⁰⁵ Dumbledore still withholds crucial and extremely relevant information even after he says to Harry, "I am going to tell you everything" (Rowling 2003:735).

¹⁰⁶ Rowling (1997:216).

Upon his arrival at Hogwarts, the first ordeal which Harry dreads is the house-sorting ritual in which a seemingly telepathic Sorting Hat places the new students in their respective houses by analysing different aspects of their character and intellectual potential. By introducing this device, Rowling takes the concept of house¹⁰⁷ to another dimension in which placement depends on careful consideration of the unique characteristics of the individual. Because of this selection process, 'Hogwarts houses have characters of their own, long-standing and perpetuating, a feature present in public school novels but heightened here through magical means' (Steege 2002:146).

Furthermore, as Amanda Cockrell (2002:22) suggests, the Hogwarts house personalities 'reflect the balance of forces necessary in the world: Slytherin for the politicians, from whose ranks the power-mad Voldemort and his disciples came; Ravenclaw for the intellectuals; Hufflepuff for the workers, the ones who get things done; and Gryffindor for the potential heroes, the warriors'. Steege (2002:146) further notes that 'for Harry, as for Tom Brown and so many schoolboys or schoolgirls, being in another house is unthinkable – it is not just a temporary association, but a very real part of one's identity'.

Although the Sorting Hat tells Harry that he can achieve greatness in Slytherin, Harry begs to be placed in Gryffindor, because of Slytherin's reputation for producing 'Dark wizards'.¹⁰⁸ The hat grants his wish, as Harry apparently displays potential for either house; and in this seemingly simple scene, we effectively witness Harry making his possibly naïve, but ultimately defining *choice* regarding the kind of person he wishes to become. As Dumbledore aptly puts it during a discussion concerning Harry's identity (Rowling 1999:333): 'It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.'

As in most public school stories, competition between rival Hogwarts houses is rife and intense. Frequent mention is also made of the tension between the adult

¹⁰⁷ Section 3.3.8 highlights the link between house affiliation and personal identity in traditional boys' school stories.

¹⁰⁸ Rowling consistently capitalises the adjective. See Rowling (1997:80) for example.

Heads of the respective houses, which in itself serves to reinforce the validation of ‘truth’ and ‘right’ in the discourse about house loyalty and affiliation. Between Professor Snape and Professor McGonagall, for example, there is a constant sense of rivalry which Rowling frequently uses to comic effect. The following extract from *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* is adequately representative in this regard (Rowling 1998:109):

Snape’s nasty smile widened.

“I suggest, Headmaster, that Potter is not being entirely truthful,” he said. “It might be a good idea if he were deprived of certain privileges until he is ready to tell us the whole story. I personally feel he should be taken off the Gryffindor Quidditch team until he is ready to be honest.”

“Really, Severus,” said Professor McGonagall sharply, “I see no reason to stop the boy playing Quidditch. The cat wasn’t hit over the head with a broomstick”

While this excerpt highlights the comical aspects of inter-house rivalry, the following passage from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* hints at the more serious disadvantages of the system (Rowling 2003:507):

George yawned widely and looked out disconsolately at the cloudy night sky. “I dunno if I even want to watch this match. If Zacharias Smith beats us I might have to kill myself.”

“Kill him, more like,” said Fred firmly.

“That’s the trouble with Quidditch,” said Hermione absent-mindedly, once again bent over her Runes translation, “it creates all this bad feeling and tension between the houses.” She looked up [...] and caught Fred, George and Harry all staring at her with mingled disgust and incredulity on their faces.

Hermione makes this remark in view of the fact that Zacharias Smith is a fellow member of the DA (Dumbledore’s Army), a consideration which should lessen the enmity felt and expressed against him. It would seem that Hermione fears that in times of external opposition, house-rivalry might mar the unity and solidarity required to resist the onslaught. In the final showdown, however, this is not the case and Gryffindors, Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws are shown fighting side by side against the common enemy, although the vast majority of Slytherins choose to be evacuated from Hogwarts prior to the battle.

Nevertheless, inter-house rivalry is not limited to sporting achievements. In fact, the school functions on a merit system whereby achievements by any individual can earn them points for their house, while unsatisfactory behaviour results in the deduction of points. Those who incur losses to their house must endure the sometimes harsh reproaches of their comrades who tend to view such conduct as little less than criminal. In his first year at Hogwarts, Harry and his closest friends have the misfortune of being responsible for the loss of one hundred and fifty Gryffindor points – a circumstance which means that their arch-rival, Slytherin house, gains the lead (Rowling 1997:178):

At first, Gryffindors passing the giant hour-glasses that recorded the house points next day thought there'd been a mistake. How could they suddenly have a hundred and fifty points fewer than yesterday? And then the story began to spread: Harry Potter, the famous Harry Potter, their hero of two Quidditch matches, had lost them all those points, him and a couple of other stupid first years. From being one of the most popular and admired people at the school, Harry was suddenly the most hated. Even Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs turned on him, because everyone had been longing to see Slytherin lose the House Cup. Everywhere Harry went, people pointed and didn't trouble to lower their voices as they insulted him.

The methods employed by the other students to indicate their disapproval reflect the mechanisms of control that operate within the student body to ensure adherence to the school code. With direct reference to the 'normalisation' of discourses in the school context, Noomé (2006:121) argues:

In the school story, the child (as coloniser) is not powerless, but extraordinarily powerful. When the in-groups in these stories exercise that power, they enforce their code as "normal" and "silence" the "other", in this case, the child in the out-group. The in-group claims that they are acting for the good of the school [in this case for the good of the house] and for the good of the child who has to be brought into line. Inclusion in the in-group is a reward, exclusion from it is a punishment.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ As Noomé (2006:121) notes, the most severe method of punishment by exclusion from the in-group takes the form of sending the offender to 'Coventry'. In *The Fifth Form at St. Dominic's*, Talbot Baines Reed hints at the adverse effects of this particular form of punishment when the accused is, in fact, innocent. As a result of the harsh and unjust treatment accorded him by his peers, Oliver Greenfield's health seems to be affected to such an extent that one of his masters becomes somewhat concerned (Reed [1881] 1887:29):

"I don't know what crime he has committed, but the tribunal of his class have been very severe on him, I fancy."

Thus the perpetuation of discourses that determine acceptable behaviour is ensured by the students themselves, a system which seems (at Hogwarts, at least), to be effective in discouraging disobedience and encouraging conformity to the norm.

In the context of boys' school stories, Rowling's presentation of the house points system constitutes an alternative to the discourse of corporal punishment as a means of 'colonising' the students, a system which promotes an emergent discourse of discipline which despite (or, perhaps, because of) its non-violent approach, succeeds in perpetuating the values of the Hogwarts school code. Implicit in this presentation is the suggestion that the emergent discourse is perhaps less scarring than the previously dominant discourse of corporal punishment – an assertion which some victims of verbal and emotional abuse would possibly challenge. In fact, Harry views the times when he was subjected to harsh, judgemental treatment from his fellow students as some of his worst days at Hogwarts.

By depicting the students' implementation of this control mechanism against Harry, Rowling also draws attention to the fickle nature of popularity. Outside of his closest friendships – which have their own frustrations – Harry comes to the realisation that, whatever his motives or intentions may be, his acceptance by his house and school fellows depends almost entirely on his ability to bring success to Gryffindor through sporting achievements. In this respect, Harry, as boy protagonist, faces the same dilemma as many of his historical fictional counterparts. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from Finnemore's *Teddy Lester's Schooldays* ([1911] 1953:9):

Then the door was opened, and in came the prefects of the House, headed by a tall figure, at the sight of which Jayne's raised a rapturous cheer. [...] It was Tom Sandys who came in, now not merely captain of Jayne's House, but captain of Slapton school. Step by step he had risen, and honour after honour had fallen

The Doctor laughed.

"Boys will be boys! [...] We have no right to interfere with these boyish freaks, as long as they are not mischievous. But you might keep an eye on the little comedy, Jellicott. It would be a pity for it to go too far."

into the hands of *as fine an athlete as had ever stepped on Slapton playing-fields.* (my emphasis)

Finnemore clearly indicates that it is Tom Sandys's athletic prowess that has earned him the overwhelming acceptance of his peers and the approval of his masters. Similarly, Harry's triumphs on the Quidditch pitch bring him recognition from fellow students and teachers alike. Perhaps the most descriptive of these moments occurs in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, when, after three years of training, Harry finally gains the victory for Gryffindor in the Quidditch Cup (Rowling 1999:230):

Harry had a confused impression of noise and bodies pressing in on him. Then he, and the rest of the team, were hoisted onto the shoulders of the crowd. [...] Professor McGonagall was sobbing harder even than Wood, wiping her eyes with an enormous Gryffindor flag. [...] As a sobbing Wood passed Harry the Cup, as he lifted it into the air, Harry felt he could have produced the world's best Patronus.

Despite this overwhelming experience, Harry's career at Hogwarts seems to oscillate between the two extremes of the popularity scale, a circumstance which Rowling seems to deem necessary for the proper development of Harry's character. Short moments of euphoria are interspersed with much more significant periods of trial during which he must suffer derision, suspicion and isolation. The purpose of such hardships is discussed by Lavoie (2003:38) in her chapter, 'Safe as Houses', in which she suggests that the actual role of Slytherin house in Hogwarts is to test the moral courage of Gryffindor, the house which values bravery and valour above all. It is significant, moreover, that practically all the evil wizards mentioned in the series belonged to Slytherin at some point, and thus the transferral of house rivalry within the microcosm of the school to the macrocosm of the outside world becomes a magical representation of the universal rivalry between the forces of good and evil. Evil (represented, in general, by Slytherin), then, exists in order to identify good as such.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ This idea coincides with the theory of inter-discursivity discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2.3, where I illustrate the way in which opposing discourses define one another.

Rowling carries the motif of house loyalty and affiliation as synonymous with one's allegiance with either good or evil through to the last book in the series. When describing the Room of Requirement at Hogwarts in which Harry's supporters have taken refuge, Rowling (2007:464) is careful to mention that the walls are covered in bright tapestry hangings: 'Harry saw the gold Gryffindor lion, emblazoned on scarlet; the black badger of Hufflepuff, set against yellow, and the bronze eagle of Ravenclaw, on blue. The silver and green of Slytherin alone were absent.'¹¹¹ Slytherin's absence is significant in that none of the Slytherin students are driven to seek refuge in the Room of Requirement from the evil Carrow regime, mainly because many of their parents are Death Eaters – a consideration which inevitably associates these students with evil.

In effect, Rowling has drawn upon and greatly magnified the discourse of loyalty to one's house and used it as a signifying element throughout her works. Nevertheless, to every rule there is an exception. In this case, it is the ambiguous role that Professor Snape, the Head of Slytherin house, plays in the eventual triumph over Voldemort's regime. From the start he displays open hostility towards Harry; and his position remains uncertain until the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, when his allegiance to the Dark lord seems confirmed when he murders Albus Dumbledore, the Gryffindor¹¹² headmaster of Hogwarts. A twist in the final instalment of the tale, however, enlightens Harry concerning the great personal risks that Snape has actually faced in order to protect Harry from harm, and his deeper reasons for doing so.

Professor Severus Snape's unsung courage and bravery induces such respect in Harry that he eventually names one of his sons after him. Even in the last chapter of the final book, Rowling (2007:606) returns to the discourse of house affiliation when this son, about to board the Hogwarts Express for the first time, asks Harry fearfully, 'What if I'm in Slytherin?'

¹¹¹ No Slytherin students took refuge in the Room of Requirement, and therefore Slytherin was not represented in the decor.

¹¹² In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Hermione mentions that Dumbledore was himself a Gryffindor (Rowling 1997:79).

“Albus Severus,” Harry said quietly [...] “you were named for two headmasters of Hogwarts. One of them was a Slytherin and he was probably the bravest man I ever knew.”

“But just say – ”

“ – then Slytherin house will have gained an excellent student, won’t it? It doesn’t matter to us, Al. But if it matters to you, you’ll be able to choose Gryffindor over Slytherin. The Sorting Hat takes your choice into account.”

“Really?”

“It did for me,” said Harry.

In this episode, Rowling effectively turns the dominant discourse of house affiliation being synonymous with implied identity on its head and reminds the reader of another discourse which dominates every Harry Potter book. Simply put, it is a discourse of identity (verbally expressed by Dumbledore¹¹³) that asserts that it is our independent choices, and not merely the discursive structures of a given society, that determine who we truly are. House allegiance, and, as Dumbledore points out, even birth (pure-blood, half-blood or Muggle) do not predetermine identity: ‘It matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be’ (Rowling 2000:615).

4.3.4 The significance of sport

Closely linked to the idea of loyalty to one’s house is the vital importance of house sport matches. As young Brooke claims in his rousing speech addressed to the members of his house on Tom Brown’s first night at Rugby, “I know I’d sooner win two school-house matches running than get the Balliol scholarship any day” – (frantic cheers)’ (Hughes [1857] 1971:101).

In a sense, active sporting combat on the field is the main physical enactment of the rivalry which exists between the houses on a subliminal level throughout the rest of the school experience. While public school stories relate the dazzling performances of the house eleven or fifteen, Hogwarts boasts only one sport,

¹¹³ See the epigraph to this chapter (Rowling 1998:245)

known as Quidditch, a magical game which is played on broomsticks and which follows a complex game structure.

Quidditch would probably be categorised as a contact sport, and certainly surpasses any Muggle (non-magic) sport in terms of the mortal peril the players face. Speeding around on a broomstick that boasts ‘an acceleration of 0-150 miles an hour in ten seconds’ (Rowling 1999:43) at dizzying altitudes whilst trying to avoid being deliberately knocked off one’s broom by Bludgers from the opposing team accounts for the game’s notorious risk of injury. Rowling (1997:132) comments in passing that ‘although people rarely died playing Quidditch, referees had been known to vanish and turn up months later in the Sahara Desert’. Given the extreme intensity of the sport Rowling invents for her wizarding world, it is not at all surprising that her characters regard it as a matter of paramount importance. This motif is certainly not unprecedented in boys’ school stories. Nevertheless, while in the traditional, fictional Slapton school, for example, ‘the chances of the two elevens were discussed hotly in every house’ (Finnemore [1909] 1953:106), the approach of a Quidditch match tends to have more serious consequences (Rowling 1999:222):

Never, in anyone’s memory, had a match approached in such a highly charged atmosphere. By the time the holidays were over, tension between the two teams and their houses was at breaking point. A number of small scuffles broke out in the corridors, culminating in a nasty incident in which a Gryffindor fourth-year and a Slytherin sixth-year ended up in the hospital wing with leeks sprouting out of their ears.

Similarly, Rowling depicts Wood, the captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team, as a boy who takes his position extremely seriously and tries to incite his team to victory. Unfortunately, his efforts are constantly undermined by the wit of the Weasley twins, whose comments seem to highlight the stereotypical nature of his approach (Rowling 1997:136):

Wood cleared his throat for silence.

“OK, men,” he said.

“And women,” said Chaser Angelina Johnson.

“And women,” Wood agreed. “This is it.”

“The big one,” said Fred Weasley.

“The one we’ve all been waiting for,” said George.

“We know Oliver’s speech by heart,” Fred told Harry. “We were on the team last year.”

“Shut up, you two,” said Wood. “This is the best team Gryffindor’s had in years. We’re going to win. I know it.”

He glared at them all as if to say, “Or else.”

In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Rowling 1998:126), Wood seems to have become even more desperate for the Quidditch Cup and says in his ‘usual pre-match pep talk’ during which his chest is ‘heaving with emotion’: “It’ll be down to you, Harry. [...] Get to that snitch before Malfoy, or die trying, Harry, because we’ve got to win today, we’ve got to.” This ludicrously exaggerated command is mocked by Fred Weasley, who says with a wink, “So no pressure, Harry” (Rowling 1998:126). Rowling is clearly satirising the do-or-die discourse of sport that is considered by many to be over-rated despite its arguably dominant status in historical and contemporary sporting contexts.

Given the narrative importance of Quidditch in the series, it would seem inevitable that Rowling would follow the trend of traditional school stories by making her protagonist a gifted sportsman. In fact, Harry unexpectedly becomes the youngest player to make a Hogwarts house team in more than a century. The position he fills and retains throughout his career at the school is that of Seeker, the only player on the team who is responsible for catching the elusive golden Snitch and, in so doing, bringing the game to an end.

Harry’s Quidditch performances are at once spectacular and breathtaking, and his natural aptitude for his role is frequently alluded to. In establishing her protagonist’s identity as a unique and talented individual, Rowling’s apparent ‘overkill’ is effective. Suman Gupta (2003:157) comments that the innate abilities that make Harry a natural Seeker constitute ‘about as much confirmation of being a chosen person in the order of Magic things as could have been needed. [...] He

never loses through a fair game and usually wins despite unfair disadvantages. And it all comes naturally’.

In his chapter entitled, ‘The Seeker of Secrets: Images of Learning, Knowing and Schooling’, Elster (2003:205) suggests another thought-provoking analogy:

When he plays Quidditch, Harry Potter is the Seeker. [...] Throughout the novels, Harry is the Seeker after secret knowledge, knowledge of clues to Voldemort’s plans. At the end of each book, Harry uncovers Voldemort’s plot (catches the Snitch) and ends the game – until their rematch in the next volume.

Although Elster’s comments were published after the release of only the first four books, it is interesting that their validity has increased with subsequent publications. Although Harry is presented throughout the first five novels as what may well be termed a symbolic seeker, it is only in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* that Dumbledore introduces Harry to the task of seeking out Voldemort’s horcruxes – objects used in the ‘darkest’ magic, bewitched to contain fragments of an evil wizard’s soul, thus securing him a kind of immortality. In order to finally conquer Voldemort, Harry must continue the work that Dumbledore has begun by discovering and destroying each of these horcruxes.

Harry’s quest¹¹⁴ continues in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, in which the objects prove to be as elusive as any golden Snitch. In fact, Harry actually manages to retrieve one of the horcruxes while he is flying on a broomstick and employing what are clearly Quidditch tactics (Rowling 2007:509): ‘...Harry made a hairpin swerve and dived. The diadem seemed to fall in slow motion, turning and glittering as it dropped towards the maw of a yawning serpent, and then he had it, caught it around his wrist – .’ There are certainly similarities between this excerpt and the next from *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Rowling 1999:229):

¹¹⁴ As noted in Section 3.2.1 in the discussion of *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* as a kind of *Bildungsroman*, the growth process is, as described by Hader (cited in Noomé 2004:126), ‘at its roots a quest story’ and can be described as ‘an apprenticeship to life’.

“Go! Go! Go!” Harry urged his broom. They were gaining on Malfoy ... Harry flattened himself to the broom handle [...] Harry threw himself forwards, taking both hands off his broom. He knocked Malfoy’s hand out of the way and –

“YES!”

He pulled out of his dive, his hand in the air, and the stadium exploded. [...] The tiny golden ball was held tight in his fist, beating its wings hopelessly against his fingers.

By making explicit use of Quidditch terms and tactics in relation to Harry’s greater quest against incarnate evil, Rowling, in effect, seems to be likening the universal struggle to a Quidditch match. Although in this respect she is in no way a pioneer – frequent mention has been made of the use of combat metaphors in the description of sport matches¹¹⁵ – Rowling has certainly extended the concept and made exhaustive use of its narrative possibilities.

Furthermore, her constant reinforcement and reiteration of the motif is such that the result can certainly not be merely coincidental. In the ultimate duel between Harry and Voldemort, representing the universal struggle between good and evil, Rowling does not fail to weave Quidditch metaphors into her writing (Rowling 2007: 595; my emphases):

The bang was like a cannon-blast and the golden flames that erupted between them, at the dead centre of the circle they had been treading, marked the point where the spells collided. Harry saw Voldemort’s green jet meet his own spell, saw the Elder Wand fly high, dark against the sunrise, spinning across the enchanted ceiling like the head of Nagini, spinning through the air towards the master it would not kill, who had come to take full possession of it at last. And Harry, *with the unerring skill of the Seeker*, caught the wand in his free hand as Voldemort fell backwards ...

In this culminating episode, Rowling’s choice of the word ‘Seeker’ is perhaps intentionally ambiguous, in that she may be describing Harry in one sense as a well-trained Quidditch player, and in another as a true seeker of secret knowledge. The latter interpretation is further strengthened by Harry’s words just moments before the final climax (Rowling 2007:591):

¹¹⁵ See Section 3.3.7.

“Yes, I dare,” said Harry, “I know things you don’t know, Tom Riddle. I know lots of important things that you don’t. Want to hear some, before you make another big mistake?”

Voldemort did not speak, but prowled in a circle, and Harry knew that he kept him temporarily mesmerised and at bay, held back by the faintest possibility that Harry might indeed know a final secret ...

It is evident, therefore, that in her treatment of the motif of the significance of sport, Rowling has not merely built upon historical convention, but has, rather, extended its metaphoric treatment. In terms of implied discourse, moreover, Harry’s training on the Quidditch pitch becomes symbolic of his preparation for the conflict of life.¹¹⁶ Not only does the sport field resonate with the overtones of war and combat, as in historical boy’s school stories (see Section 3.3.7), but the ultimate victory, the catching of the Snitch, is represented as synonymous with enlightenment and the power of truth. Harry’s thoughts reiterate this idea just before he finally discovers the Resurrection Stone (the Hallow which enables him to make the ultimate sacrifice) which Dumbledore has hidden in the Snitch that Harry caught in his very first Quidditch match (Rowling 2007:559): ‘...the long game was ended, the Snitch had been caught, it was time to leave the air’

4.4 TEACHERS IN THE NARRATIVE

According to Natov (2002:132), the teachers at Hogwarts can be ‘imaginative and compassionate; they are also flighty, vindictive, dim-witted, indulgent, lazy, frightened and frightening’. From this broad scope of descriptions, it is evident that Rowling has deliberately broadened the scope of her works to include several different kinds of teacher¹¹⁷ in Harry’s schooling experience. Her larger-than-life characters (such as Professor Albus Dumbledore, Professor Minerva McGonagall, Rubeus Hagrid and Professor Severus Snape) act and react in

¹¹⁶ In *Jack’s Heroism: A Story of School Boy Life* (1883), Kenyon (cited in Musgrave 1985:103) writes: ‘He said I was to try to become a brave, good man. He said life was for every one something like a battle.’

¹¹⁷ In fact, some of Harry’s teachers are not even entirely human, like Firenze, the centaur, whose main priority ‘did not seem to be to teach them what he knew, but rather to impress upon them that nothing, not even centaurs’ knowledge was foolproof’ (Rowling 2003:532).

ways generally consistent with their original character sketch throughout the series, while Rowling's specific plot requirements allow for a constant influx of new figures of authority with each instalment. It is also on account of the constantly evolving, underlying plot that one cannot make general assessments regarding the kinds of teacher who work at Hogwarts, as many of the individuals play roles in the narrative which go beyond the mere school environment and affect the universal conflict between good and evil.

4.4.1 Some Hogwarts teachers

Even where Rowling's creations border on the stereotypical, there is always one fundamental difference: the teachers are able to use magic. Professor Binns, for instance, seems to represent the conventional history professor when he reads his notes in 'a flat drone like an old vacuum cleaner until nearly everyone in the class was in a deep stupor, occasionally coming round long enough to copy down a name or date, then falling asleep again' (Rowling 1998:113). Be that as it may, he diverges somewhat from the norm in that he is 'ancient and shrivelled' and had 'simply got up to teach one day and left his body behind him in an armchair in front of the staff room fire', his ghostly abilities accounting for the fact that 'the most exciting thing that ever happened in his classes was his entering the room through the blackboard' (Rowling 1998:112).

It may be argued that the most stereotyped figure of authority at Hogwarts is that of the caretaker, Argus Filch, who, as his name implies, attempts to be an all-seeing eye, in order to catch disobedient students red-handed. He is aided in his task by his seemingly telepathic cat, Mrs Norris, who has luminous eyes and often appears on the scene apparently out of nowhere. Filch's sinister delight in snooping in search of delinquents resonates through his ominous instructions to Mrs Norris: "Sniff around, my sweet, they might be lurking in a corner" (Rowling 1997:117). This depiction differs very little from Kipling's portrayal of Foxy, the 'subtle red-haired school Sergeant' whose business, as we are told in *Stalky &*

Co., 'was to wear tennis-shoes, carry binoculars, and swoop hawk-like upon evil boys' (Kipling [1899] 1994:1).

Rowling adds another dimension to Filch's dislike for the students. In the second novel, Harry discovers that Filch is a 'Squib', that is, a person who is born into a magical family, but who is unable to perform magic. This apparent limitation would possibly account for his hatred of the magically competent students he sets out to trap, and his express desire to have the historical methods of punishment reinstated, in particular the practice of hanging perpetrators from the ceiling by their wrists for a few days (Rowling 1997:181). If Filch's sentiments are indeed driven by a degree of jealousy towards the students, one could argue that his predicament differs very little from that of Foxy in Kipling's novel.¹¹⁸ Just as Foxy must witness the boys he supervises being trained for desirable positions in the outside world and accept the fact that he has little or no place in that world, so Filch must watch hundreds of young, capable wizards and witches enter the world of magic, a sphere which offers him (as a Squib) few or no career possibilities. Their situations in life, as well as their respective coping mechanisms, are thus strikingly similar, with Rowling's creation being in no way entirely unprecedented or original.¹¹⁹

Professor McGonagall initially appears to be the epitome of the traditional stern, tight-lipped disciplinarian – and an authority, in short, to be reckoned with.¹²⁰ And

¹¹⁸ In 'Harry Potter and the Secret Password', Amanda Cockrell (2002:19) investigates the similarities between Harry and Stalky as schoolboy protagonists.

¹¹⁹ It may be argued that one of the significant differences between Foxy and Filch is that, whereas Kipling never explicates the possibly resentful motives which dictate Foxy's behaviour, Rowling clearly spells out the reasons for Filch's dislike of the students. For example, in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Filch accuses Harry of vindictively petrifying Mrs Norris because he thinks Harry despises him as an inferior (Rowling 1998:108):

"He [Harry] did it, he did it!" Filch spat, his pouchy face purpling. "You saw what he wrote on the wall! He found – in my office – he knows I'm a – I'm a – " Filch's face worked horribly. "He knows I'm a Squib!" he finished.

¹²⁰ Glover (2003:54) notes that Professor McGonagall, 'in line with traditional strict female teachers', 'wears "her hair in a tight bun; her sharp eyes were framed with square spectacles" (Rowling 1997:69)'. As mentioned earlier, similarities between relevant aspects of the Harry Potter books and traditional girls' school stories are not explored in this chapter. However, a comparative study of the female teachers at Hogwarts with their historical fictional counterparts may be enlightening. Permanent female members of staff include Professor McGonagall, the

indeed, Harry and his friends soon discover that Harry's first impression 'that this was someone not to cross'¹²¹ was certainly an accurate one. Moreover, Professor McGonagall's introductory speech during Harry's first Transfiguration lesson begins in a rather stereotypical manner, even though it ends with an unexpected magical twist (Rowling 1997:99):

Strict and clever, she [Professor McGonagall] gave them a talking-to the moment they had sat down in her first class.

"Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts," she said. "Anyone messing around in my class will leave and not come back. You have been warned."

Then she changed her desk into a pig and back again.

Nevertheless, as Whited and Grimes (2002:203) note, even the severe Minerva McGonagall is inconsistent as a 'paragon of scrupulousness'. A prime example of this occurs in the first book when she, as Head of Gryffindor House, makes an exception to the eligibility regulations and manages to secure Harry a position on the Quidditch team although he is too young, and despite the fact that he has just been caught in an act of blatant disobedience. Her decision to overlook his transgression is clearly influenced by a desire to see her house win the Quidditch Cup (Rowling 1997:113):

"I shall speak to Professor Dumbledore and see if we can't bend the first-year rule. Heaven knows we need a better team than last year. *Flattened* in the last match by Slytherin, I couldn't look Severus Snape in the face for weeks..."

Professor McGonagall peered sternly over her glasses at Harry.

"I want to hear you're training hard, Potter, or I may change my mind about punishing you."

Then suddenly she smiled.

"Your father would have been proud," she said, "he was an excellent Quidditch player himself."

Gryffindor Head of House, Professor Trelawney, the dreamy Divination teacher, Professor Sprout, the Herbology teacher, Madam Hooch, the Quidditch coach, and the bustling, efficient Matron, Madam Pomfrey. Temporary teachers like Professor Grubbly-Plank and the cruel and manipulative Professor Umbridge vary the narrative and significantly alter the representation of the school experience.

¹²¹ Rowling (1997:85).

In this excerpt, Rowling also seems to be attempting to portray Professor McGonagall as a multi-faceted character, at once stern and compassionate, with a clear inclination and tenderness for Harry beneath her severe outward appearance. These characteristics remain consistent throughout the series and are even evident in the last book, in which she is torn between a desire to reprimand Harry for his thoughtlessness and relief at seeing him again (Rowling 2007:477):

“Potter!” whispered Professor McGonagall, clutching her heart. “Potter – you’re here! What – ? How – ?” She struggled to pull herself together. “Potter, that was foolish!”

“He spat at you,” said Harry.

“Potter, I – that was very – very gallant of you – but don’t you realise – ?”

“Yeah, I do,” Harry assured her. [...] “Professor McGonagall, Voldemort’s on the way.”

Another fascinating character who features prominently throughout the series is Professor Snape, the pale, vindictive, greasy-haired Potions master who is also Head of Slytherin house. Snape’s constant victimisation and evident dislike of Harry seems, at first glance, to be a possible replica of the extremely unpopular type of school master who finds fulfilment in exposing his least favourite students to ridicule. King, the notorious master described in Kipling’s *Stalky & Co.*, is an excellent example of characters cast in this mould (Kipling [1899] 1994:42): ‘In sign of his unruffled calm, King proceeded to tear Beetle [one of the protagonists], whom he called Gigadibs, slowly asunder. From his untied shoe-strings to his mended spectacles (the life of a poet at a big school is hard) he held him up to the derision of his associates’. Similarly, during Harry’s very first Potions lesson, Snape submits him to an unexpected quiz concerning things Harry knows absolutely nothing about. When Harry is unable to answer a single question, Snape says sneeringly, ‘Tut, tut – fame clearly isn’t everything’ (Rowling 1997:102).

His spiteful comments are not, however, reserved purely for Harry – practically all the Gryffindor students dread his harsh criticisms and sarcasm. The following

excerpt describing a third-year Potions lesson is typical of Snape's teaching style (Rowling 1999:96):

A few cauldrons away, Neville [a rather scatterbrained Gryffindor]¹²² was in trouble. Neville regularly went to pieces in Potions lessons; it was his worst subject, and his great fear of Professor Snape made things ten times worse. His potion, which was supposed to be a bright, acid green, had turned –

“Orange, Longbottom,” said Snape, ladling some up and allowing it to splash back into the cauldron, so that everyone could see. “Orange. Tell me, boy, does anything penetrate that thick skull of yours? Didn't you hear me say, quite clearly, that only one rat spleen was needed? Didn't I state plainly that a dash of leech juice would suffice? What do I have to do to make you understand, Longbottom?”

Such behaviour results in Snape's relative unpopularity with the main characters throughout the series. Rowling, however, manages to manipulate the narrative in such a way that the least favoured personality eventually turns out to be one of the most courageous fighters for the cause of good against evil, a cause for which he ultimately dies. In essence, it is the true understanding of Snape's role throughout the novels which becomes the key to Harry's acquisition of the secret knowledge which eventually exposes the flaw in Voldemort's plan. This flaw turns out to be the fact that Snape's apparently cold-blooded murder of Dumbledore at the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* was planned and agreed upon between Dumbledore and Snape approximately a year before its occurrence, at Dumbledore's request. The idea of a headmaster's arranging his own manner of dying is in itself bizarre, but then again, his entire personality is a departure from the norm, so one is not entirely surprised.

In Chapter Three, I observed that in traditional boys' school stories, teachers usually only feature on the fringe of a circle of student friendships and enmities. In Rowling's books, however, the teachers form an integral part of the narrative

¹²² Rowling's depiction of Neville's character throughout the series is thought-provoking in that while the boy lacks self-confidence and feels that he is not brave enough to be in Gryffindor (Rowling 1997:160), he nevertheless plays a vital role in the eventual triumph over Voldemort. The ultimate validation of his status as a true Gryffindor occurs when he is able to retrieve the Gryffindor sword from the sorting hat in order to kill Nagini in the last book. Dumbledore, however, in his wisdom, notices, acknowledges and rewards Neville's courage in the very first book. In speaking of Neville's actions he points out that “[t]here are all kinds of courage. [...] It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. I therefore award ten points to Mr Neville Longbottom” (Rowling 1997:221).

and they are often portrayed with more attention to detail than is used in the depiction of some of the students. In fact, although the teachers are somewhat distanced from the students at the beginning of the series, the culminating chapters of the last book show a complete conflation of the student and teacher spheres when the adult and child characters are seen fighting side by side against common enemies. This shift from the norm is a direct result of the violation of the microcosmic status of the school that is implicit in the intrusion by the Death Eaters. In traditional boys' school stories, however, adult characters are presumably able to prevent such catastrophes and the boys remain relatively unaffected by external conflict. In this context, Rowling's depiction of intrinsically vulnerable and even (at times) powerless teachers questions the discourse implicit in traditional boys' school stories that suggests that adults are capable of producing and maintaining a relatively protected environment for the child.

4.4.2 'Great man, Dumbledore'¹²³

On the whole, Rowling's depiction of Albus Dumbledore is perhaps the area in which she presents the most subversive deviations from previously dominant discourses.¹²⁴ Although Professor Dumbledore is highly respected by most of the wizarding world, and feared by the remnant, he certainly never assumes the self-conscious stateliness and formality so characteristic of traditional boys' public school headmasters. Instead, he displays a jovial, extremely eccentric personality which tends to endear him to most of his students. His opening speech on Harry's first night at Hogwarts is entirely characteristic, as is the enthusiastic response of his admirers (Rowling 1997:91):

Albus Dumbledore had got to his feet. He was beaming at the students, his arms opened wide, as if nothing could have pleased him more than to see them all there.

¹²³ Rowling (1997:48).

¹²⁴ In response to the question (posed by one of her fans) enquiring whether Dumbledore had ever loved any one, Rowling replied, "Dumbledore is gay, actually" (Newsweek Web, 16 October 2007). According to *Newsweek Web* (16 October 2007), Rowling explained that Dumbledore had an unrequited love affair with Gillert Grindelwald, whom he later defeated in a legendary duel.

“Welcome!” he said. “Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!”

“Thank you!”

He sat back down. Everybody clapped and cheered. Harry didn’t know whether to laugh or not.

“Is he – a bit mad?” he asked Percy uncertainly.

“Mad?” said Percy airily. “He’s a genius! Best wizard in the world! But he is a bit mad, yes.”

This representation of Dumbledore makes him appear an eccentric but benevolent godfather who is ready and eager to see the good in all. This is certainly an alternative discourse to the one which the Doctor in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* represents, where Arnold (the headmaster), who ‘fascinates Tom in a horrible manner’, ‘strides’ in, ‘quietly turns over his book and finds the place, and then stands, cap in hand and finger in book, looking straight before his nose’ (Hughes [1857] 1971:107).

Dumbledore’s genial personality endears him at once to most of the students at Hogwarts. Although he expects them to behave with respect towards the teachers and obey the most serious rules of the institution, Dumbledore never displays the kind of petty concern with minor offences which characterises many masters in boys’ school stories. In this respect, he is not, however, entirely unlike Tom Brown’s headmaster,¹²⁵ who, we are told, ‘knows better than any one when to look, and when to see nothing; tonight is singing night, and there’s been lots of noise and no harm done; nothing but beer drunk, and nobody the worse for it’ (Hughes [1857] 1971:107).

¹²⁵ Quigly (1982:27) notes that historical boys’ school stories ‘favoured the imposing headmaster seen from a lower level (the boys’), remote, Olympian, the almost *invisible* apex of a steep hierarchical pyramid, and in art as in life Arnold [of Rugby] seems to have provided an exactly suitable figure’ (my emphasis). Similarly, Dumbledore’s actual involvement with the students on a daily level is minimal and uncommon, despite his benevolent approach. Furthermore, the positioning of his study within the heart of Hogwarts, which is only accessed by means of a secret password, adds to the actual inaccessibility and apparent ‘*invisibility*’ of Dumbledore’s profile as headmaster.

In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Dumbledore actually goes so far as to verbalise his willingness to overlook minor transgressions by responding to Harry's hasty apology with the statement, "I have gone temporarily deaf and haven't any idea what you said, Harry" (Rowling 2000:394). In fact, the question arises whether Dumbledore does not actually indirectly encourage Harry and his friends to break the rules in their search for answers to the problems they face. In their first year, Dumbledore returns Harry's invisibility cloak to him with the note, 'Just in case'. The cloak later proves essential in helping the friends enter the area on the third floor which has been declared off limits to 'everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death' (Rowling 1997:95). Harry and his friends contemplate Dumbledore's intentions after they have succeeded in thwarting Voldemort's plans (Rowling 1997:218):

"D'you think he meant you to do it?" said Ron. "Sending you your father's cloak and everything?"

"Well," Hermione exploded, "if he did – I mean to say – that's terrible – you could have been killed."

"No it isn't," said Harry thoughtfully. "He's a funny man, Dumbledore. I think he sort of wanted to give me a chance. I think he knows more or less everything that goes on here, you know. I reckon he had a pretty good idea we were going to try, and instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to help. [...] It's almost like he thought I had the right to face Voldemort if I could ..."

"Yeah, Dumbledore's barking, all right," said Ron proudly.

Not only does Dumbledore often overlook transgressions which violate the rules of the school, but he suggests (through carefully chosen phrases) to Harry and Hermione that they make illegal use of a time-turner to alter the course of events. By following his cues, Harry and Hermione manage to save two innocent lives and significantly alter the outcome of their meeting with Sirius in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. Manners Smith (2003:79) notes that Dumbledore repeatedly 'refuses to expel [Harry] for taking laudable and necessary actions that nevertheless contravene school codes or the directions of authority figures'. Skulnick and Goodman's (2003:261) comments in this regard are significant: 'Even when Harry and his friends break rules, we know as readers that, in fact, their efforts are morally righteous.' They develop the idea further by claiming that

'Harry's intentions, and therefore the results of his actions, typically uphold the "goodness" of Hogwarts' (Skulnick & Goodman 2003:261).

Herein perhaps lies the key to Dumbledore's construction of obedience: law-breaking is acceptable when it is intended for 'the greater good' or when the transgression 'serves to uphold rather than subvert the cultural values embedded in the institution' (Skulnick & Goodman 2003:268). This is an interesting deduction in that Dumbledore himself comments on the problematic nature of this philosophy in the last novel (Rowling 2007:573):

"Oh, I had a few scruples. I assuaged my conscience with empty words. It would all be for the greater good, and any harm done would be repaid a hundredfold in benefits for wizards. Did I know, in my heart of hearts, what Gellert Grindelwald was? I think I did, but I closed my eyes. If the plans we were making came to fruition, all my dreams would come true."

Through this frank confession, Dumbledore is suggesting that, though one may justify one's actions as being intended 'for the greater good', they may lead one to commit unforgivable crimes if they are driven by selfish motives. This consideration causes the line between good and evil to become slightly blurred and it is only through Rowling's frequent allusions to Harry's selflessness that his many transgressions are justified. Dumbledore verbalises this distinction between himself and Harry, claiming that this differentiation singles Harry out as 'the worthy possessor of the Hallows': 'I was selfish, Harry, more selfish than you, who are a remarkably selfless person, could possibly imagine' (Rowling 2007:573). Thus, by depicting Dumbledore as a great but inherently flawed headmaster, Rowling subverts the tendency to over-simplified stereotypes found so frequently in historical boys' school stories.

Nevertheless, despite the slightly ambivalent nature of his philosophy and the ambiguity surrounding certain of his decisions, Whited and Grimes (2002:184) maintain that 'the justice characteristic of this community [Hogwarts] is guaranteed by the presence of Albus Dumbledore'. From Harry's (and hence probably the reader's) biased perspective, this may be so, but when considered

objectively, one may argue that some of Dumbledore's actions may be seen as unjust by others, such as the Slytherins. Consider, for instance, Dumbledore's last minute readjustment of the points at the end of Harry's first year which awards the House Cup to Gryffindor instead of Slytherin. The reader rejoices with the protagonist, feeling that the preceding events merit this kind of celebration, but one cannot blame the Slytherins for thinking Dumbledore unjust in his actions. In fact, an unbiased critic would congratulate Professor Snape for managing to shake Professor McGonagall's hand 'with a horrible forced smile' shortly after the headmaster's surprising announcement (Rowling 1997:222).

According to Glover (2003:53), Dumbledore assumes the role of father-figure to his pupils, 'engendering respect by giving them a rational explanation when he disapproves of their behaviour'. While this comment holds true for the first four novels, and yet again for the sixth, it is not applicable to *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in which Dumbledore intentionally adopts a more aloof and dictatorial approach to Harry in order to prevent Voldemort from gaining valuable information via Harry's mind. Dumbledore's new treatment of him evidently pains Harry, and by slow degrees, throughout the novel, one is given glimpses into Harry's growing confusion and mounting frustration, which culminates in his eventual outburst of anger, grief and rebellion in Dumbledore's office. After a year of literal and psychological isolation from Dumbledore, Harry's bitterness finds an outlet in words (Rowling 2003:727):

"Let me out," Harry said yet again, in a voice that was cold and almost as calm as Dumbledore's.

"Not until I've had my say," said Dumbledore.

"Do you – do you think I want to – do you think I give a – I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO SAY!" Harry roared. "I don't want to hear *anything* you've got to say!"

"You will," said Dumbledore steadily. "Because you are not nearly as angry with me as you ought to be. If you are to attack me, as I know you are close to doing, I would like to have thoroughly earned it."

While Harry's treatment of his headmaster is disrespectful, it nevertheless relieves not only Harry, but also the reader, who has had to witness a year's

worth of 'adolescent agonising' (Rowling 2003:438), largely because of Dumbledore's strange aloofness. Although Harry's behaviour is shocking, it is by no means as unexpected as Dumbledore's response to this outburst. Instead of reprimanding Harry, Dumbledore humbly offers him 'an explanation of an old man's mistakes' (Rowling 2003:728), during which his unanticipated meekness, while gaining him time to explain his actions, only serves to infuriate Harry more (Rowling 2003:735):

Harry watched him, but this uncharacteristic sign of exhaustion, or sadness, or whatever it was from Dumbledore, did not soften him. On the contrary, he felt even angrier that Dumbledore was showing signs of weakness. He had no business being weak when Harry wanted to rage and storm at him.

Nevertheless, this episode is truly thought-provoking in terms of the discourse of power. Although Harry is angered by Dumbledore's display of meekness, it is actually this very approach which helps Dumbledore gain his point of getting Harry to listen to him. By assuming an apparently powerless role (he does nothing to protect himself or his possessions from Harry's physical and verbal abuse), he ultimately manages to take control of the situation and, to some extent, regain his position in Harry's affections.

This subversive use of power is certainly unusual in a headmaster, whose very position in the hierarchy of the school should (according to the dominant discourse of power typical of boys' school stories) command the respect which Harry's tirade fails to show. A possible justification for this may be that Dumbledore's relationship with Harry has become, as Dumbledore himself puts it, 'closer than that of headmaster and pupil' (Rowling 2003:729), thus accounting for increased emotional involvement in their interaction. It is unlikely, for instance, that one would find excerpts such as the following in traditional boys' school stories: 'His [Dumbledore's] eyes gazed into Harry's and it was almost as though an invisible beam of understanding shot between them' (Rowling 2000:605). Thus, by taking their relationship beyond the conventional limitations dictated by the prevalent discourse regarding headmaster-pupil relationships, Rowling allows

herself far more flexibility and scope for the exploration of character development and psychological involvement.

The most moving depiction of Harry's deep regard for Dumbledore must be in the mourning scene shortly after the murder of Dumbledore. The death of a headmaster is by no means unprecedented in boys' school stories, as the acknowledged pioneering work in the genre, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, culminates with the adult Tom Brown's attempt to come to terms with the unexpected death of Thomas Arnold of Rugby. The protagonist walks around his old school, with the memories of eight years 'all dancing through his brain, and carrying him about whither they would; while beneath them all, his heart was throbbing with the dull sense of a loss that could never be made up to him' (Hughes [1857] 1971:286). In an attempt to master his grief, Tom mounts the steps to the altar under which Arnold lies buried 'to lay down there his share of a burden which had proved itself too heavy for him to bear in his own strength' (Hughes [1857] 1971:287). The book's penultimate paragraph is of particular interest as Tom's reasons for loving and respecting Doctor Arnold bear a resemblance to Harry's feelings towards Dumbledore (Hughes [1857] 1971:288, my emphases):

Here let us leave him [Tom] – where better could we leave him, than at the altar, before which he had first caught *a glimpse of the glory of his birthright*, and felt the drawing of the bond which links all living souls together in one brotherhood – at the grave beneath the altar of him, who had opened his eyes to see that glory, and softened his heart till it could feel that bond. And let us not be hard on him [Tom], if at that moment his soul is fuller of the tomb and him who lies there,¹²⁶ than of the altar, and Him of whom it speaks.

Although Hughes is referring specifically to Tom's moral and spiritual awakening, there is also an indication that it is through the Doctor's sermons and advice that

¹²⁶ Although Dumbledore's death emphasises the inherent mortality of all humanity (wizard or Muggle), the dramatic creation of his tomb still hints at his larger-than-life character (Rowling 2005:601):

Then several people screamed. Bright, white flames had erupted around Dumbledore's body and the table upon which it lay: higher and higher they rose, obscuring the body. White smoke spiralled into the air and made strange shapes [...] but next second the fire had vanished. In its place was a white marble tomb, encasing Dumbledore's body and the table on which he had rested.

Tom discovers what he considers to be his true identity as a Christian. Similarly, Dumbledore's mentorship of Harry plays a crucial role in Harry's understanding, not only of his past, but also of the future purpose to which he should dedicate his life. Harry's position as an orphan emphasises his need for relevant information which can help him ascertain and establish his identity. It is Hagrid who first informs Harry that he is a wizard, but it is Dumbledore who gives him the guidance he needs in order to fill the position for which he seems destined. By telling Harry the details of the prophecy concerning himself and Voldemort, Dumbledore equips Harry for what lies ahead, and while it is perhaps not quite 'a glimpse of the glory of his birthright' (Hughes [1857] 1971:288), it helps Harry understand, not only his ominous future, but also his troubled and confusing past.

Only with Dumbledore's death does Harry fully realise the extent to which he depended on his headmaster's protection. In fact, the reader's first glimpse of Dumbledore in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* depicts him assuming the role of protector over one-year-old Harry as he arranges for his safety in the home of the Dursleys. When Dumbledore dies, Harry feels not only physically, but emotionally exposed as he realises that 'the path that he and Dumbledore had set out upon together' (Rowling 2005:592) would now have to be journeyed alone. The culmination of Harry's subsequent grief is described in moving terms, in some ways not unlike the extract from *Tom Brown's Schooldays*:

And then, without warning, it swept over him, the dreadful truth, more completely and undeniably than it had until now. Dumbledore was dead, gone ... he clutched the cold locket in his hand so tightly that it hurt, but he could not prevent hot tears spilling from his eyes. [...] And Harry saw very clearly as he sat there under the hot sun how people who cared about him had stood in front of him one by one, his mother, his father, his godfather, and finally Dumbledore, all determined to protect him; but now that was over. [...] There was no waking from his nightmare, no comforting whisper in the dark that he was safe really, that it was all his imagination; the last and greatest of his protectors had died and he was more alone than he had ever been before. (Rowling 2005:600)

Once the multi-faceted relationship between Harry and Dumbledore is understood, and Harry's inevitable, yet partly unconscious reliance on Dumbledore's protection has been fully explored, Rowling decides to add yet

another dimension to this unique headmaster-pupil relationship. Just a short while before Dumbledore is killed by Professor Snape, Dumbledore has willingly drunk a cursed potion in order to obtain what he thinks is one of Voldemort's horcruxes. The potion weakens him to such an extent that he is unable to help himself, and it is up to Harry to get them both to safety. Although Harry is 'more worried by Dumbledore's silence than he had been by his weakened voice', he keeps trying to reassure his headmaster that everything will be fine. Dumbledore's simple response is wholly unexpected: "I am not worried, Harry," said Dumbledore, his voice a little stronger despite the freezing water. "I am with you" (Rowling 2005:540).

This unpretentious speech is critical in gaining a true understanding of the nature of the relationship which has developed between Harry and Dumbledore and not only represents a possible reversal of roles, but also gives a glimpse of Dumbledore's high regard for Harry. Furthermore, it offers a moment of enquiry into the discourse that operates between the protector and that which he protects: a suggestion of subliminal interdependence which formulates their respective roles. By subtly alluding to Dumbledore's dependence on Harry (an idea which recurs in the brief meeting between Harry and Dumbledore at a metaphysical King's Cross Station in the last novel), Rowling succeeds in highlighting the complex and fluid nature of human relationships and the many dimensions of the discourse of power.

In another sense, the headmaster's affection for Harry also secures Dumbledore a measure of power which extends beyond his death. As Dumbledore (in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*) himself says: "You will find that I will only *truly* have left this school when none here are loyal to me" (Rowling 1998:195). In saying this, Dumbledore is suggesting that one has the ability to exercise power even in one's absence, through the loyalty one has engendered in those who are left behind. Dumbledore's statement holds true throughout the novels, and most especially in the last, where Harry sets out to accomplish the task set out for him by his late headmaster. Although Harry faces many inward struggles

and frustrations arising from what he considers Dumbledore's lack of communication concerning what he would have Harry do, whenever he is confronted with opposition, Harry is careful to make his allegiance clear (Rowling 2005:326):

"Well it is clear to me that he [Dumbledore] has done a very good job on you," said Scrimgeour, his eyes cold and hard behind his wire-rimmed glasses. "Dumbledore's man through and through, aren't you Potter?"

"Yeah, I am," said Harry. "Glad we straightened that out."

And turning his back on the Minister for Magic, he strode back towards the house.

Harry's identification of himself as 'Dumbledore's man' signifies the perpetuation of Dumbledore's influence and the power which that loyalty has over the headmaster's devotees. Scrimgeour seems convinced that Dumbledore has made a conscious effort to gain this control over Harry, but Dumbledore seems quite taken aback by Harry's frank response to the Minister (Rowling 2005:335): 'To Harry's intense embarrassment, he suddenly realised that Dumbledore's bright blue eyes looked rather watery [...] "I am very touched, Harry".'

Furthermore, it would seem that Harry regards his allegiance to his late headmaster as vital to the understanding of his own identity. While signifying his respect for Dumbledore by naming his second son Albus, Harry unwittingly assumes Dumbledore's identity as part of his own, a notion implicit in the words 'Dumbledore's man', thus reaffirming the interdependent relationships between the characters. In effect, therefore, Dumbledore's influence continues, through Harry, to affect the thoughts and actions of the next generation of wizards, as well as their perceptions of their own identity. This circumstance is particularly thought-provoking in terms of Foucault's view (cited in Heilman & Gregory 2003:242) that different kinds of power can be hard to recognise because 'a relationship of power is that mode of action which does not act directly and immediately upon others. Instead it acts upon their actions'.

The ultimate test of the relationship of power between these two characters comes when Harry realises that the late Dumbledore intended Harry to sacrifice himself in order to destroy Voldemort. On the way into the forest in the last book, Harry reflects that ‘Dumbledore had known that Harry would not duck out, that he would keep going to the end, even though it was *his* end, because he [Dumbledore] had taken trouble to get to know him, hadn’t he?’ (Rowling 2007:555). Even at the pivotal point when Harry goes out to give himself over to certain death on Dumbledore’s instructions, he is influenced by the relationship that the late headmaster had taken pains to foster with him – a relationship which Dumbledore, by all accounts, cherished. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Dumbledore says to Harry (Rowling 2005:739)

“I *cared about you* too much. [...] I cared more for your happiness than your knowing the truth, more for your peace of mind than my plan, more for your life than the lives that might be lost if the plan failed. In other words, I acted exactly as Voldemort expects we fools who *love* to act. Is there a defence? I defy anyone who has watched you as I have – and I have watched you more closely than you can have imagined – not to want to save you more pain than you had already suffered. [...] I never dreamed I would have such a person on my hands. (my emphases)

While in this excerpt Dumbledore presents his affection for Harry as a hindrance to the implementation of his ‘plan’, Harry, in retrospect, sees the relationship as crucial to the plan’s conception, as well as its success: Dumbledore knows how Harry will react to his instructions ‘*because* he had taken trouble to know him’ (Rowling 2007:555; my emphasis). Thus, the discourse of power which is implicit in Harry’s submission to Dumbledore’s wishes is portrayed as inextricably linked to the relationship between the two characters; in other words, Dumbledore’s discourse of power is underpinned by an implied discourse of love. Without this discourse of love and its inherent principles of loyalty and trust, Dumbledore’s attempt to indirectly influence (or exercise power over) Harry’s actions would have proved impossible.

This consideration brings to mind the perception of the power of love that Voldemort scathingly calls “Dumbledore’s favourite solution” (Rowling

2007:392). In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Dumbledore tells the eleven-year-old Harry that “*love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever*” (Rowling 1997:216; my emphases).

Dumbledore further suggests that what brought about Voldemort's initial downfall was a lack of *knowledge* regarding the complex relationship between power and love: “If there is one thing Voldemort cannot *understand*, it is love” (Rowling 1997:216; my emphasis). Dumbledore reiterates his belief in the final book where he, once again, cites Voldemort's ignorance as his greatest weakness (Rowling 2007:568):

“[Voldemort's] *knowledge* remained woefully *incomplete*, Harry! That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children's tales, of *love, loyalty* and innocence, Voldemort *knows and understands nothing*. [...]. That they all have a *power* beyond his own [...] is a *truth* he has never grasped.” (my emphases)

Conversely, it is Harry's ability to comprehend the relationship between knowledge, power and love described by Dumbledore that enables him to survive the onslaught of evil. As a true Seeker, Harry is able to appropriate this knowledge and use it, as did Dumbledore before him, for the greater good. In effect, Dumbledore's mentorship of Harry culminates in the perpetuation of these discourses of love, power and knowledge, a perpetuation which finds powerful expression in his protégé's willingness to sacrifice his life for those he loves. The late headmaster's satisfaction in having succeeded in his self-appointed task radiates from him ‘like light, like fire: Harry had never seen a man so utterly, so palpably content’ (Rowling 2007:567).

4.5 CONCLUSION

In 'Wizard but with a Touch of Brown', Claire Armitstead (1999:n.p.) asserts:

Look closer at this comic, gothic world [of Hogwarts], where pictures speak and every panel may hide a secret tunnel, and you find a classic boarding school fantasy, complete with dodgy food, sadistic teachers, bullies, and unshakable loyalties [...]. It is so reassuringly familiar ... fantastical on the one hand, but, on the other, quite conventionally domestic in its depiction of childhood experience.

After careful study of the entire Harry Potter series, it seems to me that Armitstead's comments, while partially valid, over-simplify the nature of Rowling's work. Although the obvious use of the general characteristics of the genre cannot be disregarded, Rowling's broad and, at times, extremely unconventional applications of the traditional motifs prevent me from describing the narrative as a *classic* boarding school fantasy.

Furthermore, as Mendlesohn (2002:175) points out, Rowling's decision to operate generally within the conventions of the school story is by no means 'inevitable', and thus her deviations from the norm should be viewed as not merely coincidental, but relevant in terms of the alternative discourses she wishes to present. Rowling displays a thorough understanding of the possibilities and limitations presented by the relevant discursive structures available to her, and she is therefore able to consciously and effectively extend their applications beyond traditional boundaries. This is particularly true of Rowling's extension of the discourse of loyalty to one's house and the discourse of sport as a preparation for life and war.

Steege (2002:153), by contrast, claims that Rowling's books merely 'modify and modernise the tradition [set by *Tom Brown's Schooldays*] so that it is more pleasing to contemporary readers in general'. That contemporary readers find the novels pleasing and accessible is evident – considering the remarkable success the series enjoys – but Steege's substantiating remarks appear to me to be incorrect. While elaborating upon some of the ways in which he believes Rowling

has modernised the traditional school story, he claims, as previously noted, that the author has intentionally softened ‘the darker side of public school life’ in order to achieve this end (Steege 2002:153). While this statement, as confirmed by the findings of this study, holds true in relation to Rowling’s exclusion of the conventional fagging system and closely related issues, it is certainly not valid in terms of the other aspects of school experience at Hogwarts.

While traditional boys’ school stories present a lively representation of controlled, though intense, rivalries between respective houses, Rowling’s world reveals a much more sinister discourse in which inter-house conflict goes beyond the realm of healthy competition into a rather frightening arena characterised by what is little short of treachery and a display of emotions tantamount to hatred. Interpersonal conflict, too, assumes terrifying possibilities, with scraps between schoolchildren resulting not merely in colourful bruises and bleeding noses, but in life-threatening injuries inflicted by curses uttered in uncontrolled anger and loathing. While it may be argued that the reader never experiences a sense of concern that these violent curses may get out of hand, the very inclusion of such indiscriminate displays of violence in the narrative constitutes, in itself, a subversion of the boys’ school story norm.

These ominous elements become more pronounced as the narrative progresses towards its climax and Rowling’s inclusion of them certainly tends to darken, rather than lighten, the overall depiction of school experience at Hogwarts. Hence, Steege’s (2002:155) assertion that ‘what Rowling’s novels do to the public school story is to preserve those elements that are fun and reasonably comprehensible to any Western reader while *deleting* the distasteful’, is unfounded. While Rowling’s ability to use existing discourses in new and humorous ways is noteworthy and perhaps largely responsible for her success as a writer, she has, in fact, deleted very few of the ‘distasteful’ elements, but has instead significantly developed and recreated them on an intensified level.

Furthermore, in view of the assertion that discourses are ‘ways of being in the world; [...] forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities’ and taking into consideration that individuals function as members of ‘not only one discourse, but rather of many’ (Gee cited in Heilman & Gregory 2003:256), a further extension of the argument becomes apparent.

While acknowledging Rowling’s inventive and often subversive use of previously accepted discourses, it is necessary to assume a more holistic approach and appreciate the overall effect of her literary productions. From this perspective it becomes evident that through Rowling’s subtle interweaving of the familiar with the unfamiliar, the expected with the unexpected, she has succeeded in creating a unique and clearly defined discursive structure that supersedes all others in Harry’s magical world; a discourse at once constraining and liberating – a world unto itself – the discourse of Hogwarts. According to this discourse, or way of being, the students reach their personal potential by cultivating, in all spheres, the qualities synonymous with their respective houses – a perception that serves to simultaneously restrict and facilitate the representation of character and individual growth.

It is according to the constraints and possibilities presented by the discourses embraced at Hogwarts that Harry Potter’s boyhood is constructed. Through the representation of the various discursive structures which simultaneously operate under the auspices of this greater discourse, Harry’s character development from pre-adolescence to young adulthood can be understood in the context of his house affiliation. Hence, Harry’s particular training as a Quidditch Seeker, the anticipated display of chivalrous and courageous attributes by Harry as a Gryffindor and the pivotal nature of Hogwarts and its customs are elements which determine the representation of Harry’s character.

Furthermore, Harry’s ultimate triumph over the destructive forces of evil is represented as inextricably linked with a painful process of self-discovery which culminates in the last book when Harry finally realises that the evil he has set out

to conquer lies within himself. In this regard, another discourse that permeates the series is significant – the complex relationship between power and knowledge. According to Foucault (1997b:18), ‘no power is exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or retention of knowledge’.

Although the circulation of knowledge is a defining characteristic of Hogwarts as an educational institution, the knowledge Harry acquires there is not merely academic. His learning experience is described, rather, as the process he submits to in order to discover what is necessary for him ultimately to conquer evil. Even the ‘private lessons’ which Dumbledore gives Harry in the penultimate novel have no purely scholastic purpose but represent, instead, the vital importance of the ‘extraction, appropriation and distribution’ of knowledge.

These elements are crucial to Harry’s extra-curricular preparation for life. Moreover, the portrayal of memory as a substance which can be removed from the original witness and viewed by others in a Pensieve adds a physical dimension to the ‘extraction’ of knowledge. Similarly, that these memories can be stored in phials and consulted at will suggests the appropriation and distribution of knowledge which is otherwise only gained by personal experience and observation. The important knowledge Harry acquires from Snape’s memories in particular makes Harry not only the possessor of the crucial clue, the ‘final secret’ (Rowling 2007:592) that helps him identify the ‘flaw in the plan’ (Rowling 2007:580), but also helps him understand, ‘[f]inally, the *truth*. Lying with his face pressed into the dusty carpet of the [headmaster’s] office where he had once thought he was *learning the secrets of victory*, Harry *understood* at last that he was not supposed to survive’ (Rowling 2007:554; my emphases). The construction of Harry’s boyhood and maturation therefore culminates in his ability to appropriate the various kinds of knowledge he has obtained during his years at Hogwarts.

Thus, Rowling’s representation of Harry’s development at the school is not merely concerned with a schoolboy’s conformity to a prevalent school code and

his eventual acceptance into society, but rather, with the depiction of the boy's daring quest for internal and external knowledge that enables him to become, once again, the 'Boy Who Lived'.¹²⁷ Although Harry, as House Quidditch Captain and a courageous, talented student, conforms to the Hogwarts school code, it is not the internalisation of the discourses implicit in this code that prepares him for the ultimate confrontation with evil. Instead, Harry's eventual victory lies in his willingness to embrace not so much a violent discourse of fighting, but a discourse of self-sacrificial love that is first demonstrated to him by his mother in her death and later commended by his headmaster as 'a power beyond the reach of any magic' (Rowling 2007:568). Dumbledore's parting words express some of the values implicit in this laudable discourse of love (Rowling 2007:578):

"Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love. By returning, you may ensure that fewer souls are maimed, fewer families are torn apart. If that seems to you a worthy goal, then we say goodbye for the present".

¹²⁷ Rowling (1997:7) and Rowling (2007:596).

CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT WOULD JESUS DO? CHRISTIAN DISCOURSES AND THE BOYS' SCHOOL STORY

Beside him Christopher slept, his breath shallow and even, his hands folded over his stomach. He even looks like a god, Toby thought, it's how a god would sleep.

(Morpurgo [1993] 2007:167)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

During a routine trip to the library with my sons several years ago, my eye fell on the Children's Laureate insignia emblazoned on the cover of a book by Michael Morpurgo. Curiosity urged me to find out why the author was so highly commended and, after reading the novel, I decided to raid the children's section for any other works by him that might be available. From the first, I marvelled at Morpurgo's clear, direct style and his willingness (I might even call it courage) to address extremely complex, yet relevant issues through children's fiction. In a superbly accessible manner, his books address such difficult issues as the pain of bereavement,¹²⁸ reaching one's full potential despite physical disabilities,¹²⁹ rebuilding one's self-esteem after the amputation of a limb¹³⁰ and the emotional impact on farmers of animal epidemics such as foot and mouth disease.¹³¹ The novel under discussion in this chapter, *The War of Jenkins' Ear*,¹³² explores the complex relationship between conflicting religious discourses and the impact of personal faith in the context of a boys' school story.

¹²⁸ *Mr Nobody's Eyes* (1989), *Waiting for Anya* ([1990] 2007)

¹²⁹ *The Ghost of Grania O'Malley* ([1996] 2001)

¹³⁰ *Dear Olly* (2000)

¹³¹ *Out of the Ashes* (2001)

¹³² The historic War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-1742) between Great Britain and Spain receives no particular attention in the novel.

In 1928, C.E. Raven (cited in Honey 1977:117) succinctly summarised the (by then more or less standard) formulaic elements of popular boys' school stories in the following tongue-in-cheek recipe:

Take a *juvenile athlete* as your chief ingredient, add a wit, a *bully*, a *persecuted fag*, an *awkward scholar*, a *faithful friend*, a *dangerous rival* and a batch of *distorted pedagogues*; mix them up in an atmosphere of genial romanticism; insert a *smoking scandal*, a *fight*, a *cribbing scene*, sundry rags, a house-match or two; bring them all to the boiling point when the hero scores the *winning try* or does the hat-trick; serve the whole hot and with a title associating the dish with an establishment with which the initiated can identify; and the suburbs will raid the libraries for the result. (my emphases)

Raven's summary of typical boys' school story elements is wonderfully accurate for most of the books in this genre. Nevertheless, there are, and have always been, exceptions that prove the rule – while *The War of Jenkins' Ear* portrays the experiences of a boy protagonist in the context of a boys' boarding school,¹³³ Morpurgo's unusual applications of key elements in the narrative challenge the discourses implicit in this historical formula.

Although Toby Jenkins, the youngest member of the school's First Fifteen, is quite clearly a *juvenile athlete* and although he manages to score a few exhilarating tries during the course of the narrative, his athletic prowess and

¹³³ At present, a public school is regarded as catering for students between the ages of 13 and 18, while a preparatory school as defined as a private school for children younger than 13.. Morpurgo is (perhaps deliberately) vague concerning the age of the protagonist. We are told that Wanda, Toby's girlfriend, is fourteen (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:6), and that Benji is old enough to ride a motor-bike on the public road (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:127), but the respective ages of Toby, Christopher and Hunter are not specified. Certain aspects of the book could, possibly, warrant the perception of Redlands as a preparatory school, which would cater for boys up to the age of about twelve or thirteen. The question then arises whether the (public) school discourses discussed in Chapter Three are relevant to a school story which is arguably set in a boys' prep school. Such a dispute would be based on the assumption that these public school discourses are only applicable to adolescent subjects. According to the benchmark publication of the genre, however, this is not the case. Thomas Hughes ([1857] 1971:129) informs us that after six months at Rugby, ten-year-old Tom Brown is promoted to the lower fourth form which caters for boys as young as nine. In fact, most of what we read concerning the protagonist's adventures and exploits, his courage and daring, his ability to endure physical pain and even torture, occurs before Tom reaches adolescence. Moreover, the creative impulse which sparked the production of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* came when Hughes pondered what he should say to his son Maurice, then aged eight, who was going away to public school (Hughes [1857] 1971:7). The discourses which filter through the text are thus clearly not intended only for boys over the age of thirteen. The wider definition of a public school implied by *Tom Brown's Schooldays* is adopted throughout this study, rather than the narrower definition used at present.

physical exploits are by no means the focal point of the story. Porter is perhaps sufficiently cruel and hot-headed to justify the alignment of his character with the *bully* prototype, but little Swann comes across as anything but a *persecuted fag*. Moreover, although Christopher is a brilliant *scholar*, ‘maybe the brightest we’ve ever had’ (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:31), he certainly isn’t *awkward*, and the most *dangerous rival* Toby has to face is not a scientific pugilist, but an angry, roaring bull. When Toby cheats in his French class there are also no repercussions significant enough to constitute a *cribbing scene* and, although Toby tries to smoke with his girlfriend, there is no authorial insinuation that this is at all *scandalous*. These observations suggest that the discourses which inform Morpurgo’s treatment of characteristic elements in the story are essentially different from the discourses which permeate traditional boys’ school stories, especially those related to integrity, courage and manliness.

Raven suggests that the school story must include *a fight*, which, as discussed in Chapter Three, usually culminates in a vindication of the protagonist’s masculinity, a convention which implies that desirable masculinity is characterised by a willingness to engage in physical combat. As the title implies, *The War of Jenkins’ Ear* does describe a fight of sorts, but not in the traditional way. Instead, the discourse of fighting which filters through the text is distinctly unconventional in terms of the celebrated formula, and signifies a subversive aspect of the novel which is discussed at length in this chapter.

The area in which Morpurgo’s version of the boys’ school story differs most from the formula is in the depiction of the *faithful friend*. In historical boys’ school stories, faithful friendship is presented in terms of cheerful camaraderie, kindness and loyalty. By contrast, the relationship which develops between Toby and Christopher is fraught with tension, even though it is seasoned with verbal reiterations of loyalty. Even at the end of the novel, one is not sure whether the betrayal of the friendship lies in Toby’s decision to speak about his friend’s powers or in Christopher’s wilful deception of Toby to achieve his own ends. Nevertheless, the depiction of a close friendship which causes the protagonist to

say of his friend, '[i]t's like he was a spirit, the Holy Spirit' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:159), constitutes a complete departure from the genial, light-hearted companionship of tradition.

This chapter focuses on Morpurgo's (at times startlingly unconventional) reconstruction of various elements of traditional boys' school stories, as well as on the contestation and possible subversion of dominant schoolboy discourses which such applications facilitate. As a noteworthy contemporary children's writer, his approach to this genre is significant, in that it provides insight into some of the themes addressed by a current children's author and the constructions of boyhood made possible by various discourses, as well as into the ways in which these discourses promote or question previously accepted discursive structures and value systems.

In view of the fact that, in South Africa at least, Michael Morpurgo is not as well-known as J.K. Rowling and John van de Ruit, I consider it expedient to include the following section which presents a short description of Morpurgo's achievements in the field of children's literature, as well as a brief summary of *The War of Jenkins' Ear*.

5.2 BACKGROUND

Michael Morpurgo is a widely acclaimed British children's writer who is described in *Children's Fiction Sourcebook* as 'a leading figure in the field of children's books' (Contemporary Authors Online 2006:6). Of his more than sixty novels and picture books written especially for children, several have been highly commended and have received various prestigious awards. According to Contemporary Authors Online (2006:1), these are the 1995 Whitbread Children's Book Award for *The Wreck of the Zanzibar* (1995), the 1996 Nestlé Smarties Book Prize Gold Award for *The Butterfly Lion* (1996), the 2000 Children's Book Award for *Kensuke's Kingdom* (1999), and the 2005 Red House Children's Book Award for *Private Peaceful* (2003). He is also a three times winner of the French

Prix Sorcière for *King of the Cloud Forests* (1988), *Wombat Goes Walkabout* (2000), and *Kensuke's Kingdom* (1999). Moreover, five of his books have been made into films and two of them, *My Friend Walter* (1988) and *Out of the Ashes* (2001), have been adapted for television. To crown his accolades, he was named Children's Laureate from 2003 to 2005, a distinction which rewards 'a lifetime contribution to children's literature' (Children's Laureate Home Page, 2008).

Morpurgo's British boys' school story, *The War of Jenkins' Ear*, was first published in 1993 and featured in the Best Books Selection of *School Library Journal* in 1995, as well as the Top of the List selection for Youth Fiction of *Booklist* in the same year. It was also short-listed for the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize.

In an interview with Ilene Cooper (1996:1), Morpurgo confirmed that the book had a strong autobiographical basis:

At the age of seven, I went away to a school in Sussex very similar to Redlands. Lots of the atmosphere I tried to convey in the book came from there. Certainly, I wanted to get across the intensity of a small community shut away from the world. Rather extraordinary feelings can build up in that situation between students and students, and teachers and students.

It is perhaps this degree of first-hand experience in a boys' boarding school that gives the novel a sense of closeness and uncanny plausibility.

5.2.1 Brief overview of the narrative

Although it is written in Morpurgo's simple and accessible style, the story addresses complex and thought-provoking ideas, tackling, as Tim Rausch (1995:219) puts it, 'provocative themes', and 'dealing with the issues of hate, revenge, prejudice, and especially faith in an intelligent and fresh manner'. The storyline is straightforward and concerns itself mainly with the personal struggles experienced by Toby ('Jinks') Jenkins, who returns after the holidays – rather unwillingly – to Redlands, a boarding school which he loathes.

His life there takes on new interest, however, with the arrival of a new boy in his form, Simon Christopher.¹³⁴ Christopher claims to have special powers and tells Toby in private that voices tell him that he is Jesus reincarnated. After making Toby promise not to view any good circumstance as pure coincidence, Christopher claims credit for a few arguable 'miracles' in order to persuade Toby to believe in him. Christopher gradually draws two other schoolboys, Hunter (the School Captain) and little Swann, into his confidence. Early in the narrative, Toby's personal life is further complicated by the fact that he falls in love with a pretty young village girl named Wanda¹³⁵ who works in the school kitchens and lives on the farm bordering the school premises.

When Toby follows Wanda across the river which forms part of the school boundary and is caught fishing on the 'wrong side' by a couple of town boys, he is subjected to a harsh beating during which a section of his ear is torn away. This episode results in the outbreak of a war between the village youths (scathingly referred to as 'oiks') and the Redlands schoolboys (the 'toffs', as the village boys call them). This war escalates rapidly, and takes on shades of a class war. Christopher tries to intercede and bring about peace, but the war continues. Meanwhile, Toby's newly established relationship with Wanda seems doomed as the conflict places Wanda's brother, Benjie, the leader of the town boys, in a vulnerable and culpable position. Torn between a desire for peace and the school spirit which shouts out for 'justice', Toby turns to Christopher for help and guidance. Through his ever-increasing belief in Christopher as the second Jesus, Toby is able to accomplish an act of bravery in front of the entire school when he saves a small schoolboy (Swann) from an angry bull that has been let loose on the school grounds by the 'oiks' as a means of seeking revenge.

¹³⁴ A literary link to William Golding's 'Simon' character in *Lord of the Flies* is perhaps suggested in the choice of Christopher's first name. Simon is also a biblical name, being the first name of the disciple Peter, and the name of the Cyrenian said to have carried Jesus' cross (Luke 23 Verse 26). Moreover, according to Christian tradition, the name 'Christopher' is derived from the Greek which means 'Christ-bearer' with special reference to the patron saint of travellers, St Christopher (Lansky & Lansky 1981:83).

¹³⁵ The inclusion of a main female character into the narrative is indicative of the shift in gendered discourses and their representation as noted in Section 2.6. Her inclusion as a character and as a love-interest is not discussed further, as it falls beyond the scope of this study.

Christopher's time at Redlands, though academically successful and by no means uneventful, is short-lived. One of the masters, Mr Birley, is struggling to cope with the ever-weakening condition of his terminally ill daughter, Jenny. Toby becomes aware of his master's dilemma and suggests to him that Christopher be allowed to come and pray for the little girl. When after two weeks there is no improvement in Jenny's condition, a series of closely linked events bring about the public exposure of Christopher's apparently blasphemous assertions and his subsequent expulsion from the school. Although the class war between the 'oiks' and the 'toffs' seems to be (temporarily, at least) resolved, and Wanda's relationship with Toby is repaired, the story ends on an ambiguous note as Mr Birley's daughter, Jenny, is seen to recover miraculously from her illness.

5.2.2 Ringing the motif changes

It is evident from this summary that, in terms of plot, Morpurgo's book does not follow the conventions of historical boys' school stories: there are no fagging wars,¹³⁶ no portrayals of unreasonable prefects and no mysteries surrounding stolen examination papers. Nevertheless, several traditional motifs, such as bullying, caning and manliness, do form part of the representation of boyhood at Redlands, although these are generally treated in unconventional ways. While sport matches do not feature as significantly in this novel as in traditional boys' school stories, they nevertheless play a vital role in the development of Toby's faith in Christopher, and their presence confirms the generic classification of this text as a school story.

Because of Morpurgo's unusual approach, several thought-provoking discourses filter through the narrative, discourses which cause one to ask, as Ilene Cooper

¹³⁶ If one regards Morpurgo's narrative as one which is set in a boys' preparatory school (as previously suggested), this would account for the absence of fagging at Redlands; fagging is generally not tolerated in preparatory schools. Whatever the reason for this absence, Morpurgo's depiction of the relationship between, for example, the Captain of the school, Hunter, and the younger boys Toby and Christopher, as well as their interactions with the much younger Swann, give no indication of an underlying discourse of hierarchical power that privileges boys according to their age or status in the school.

(1995:1) puts it, ‘the larger questions’ – questions which effectively disturb the complacency with which certain key discourses typical of boys’ school stories are absorbed and perpetuated. Notable among these are the discourses of fighting, courage and muscular Christianity. Furthermore, as discussed in the next section, Morpurgo’s various contestations of dominant discourses are evident in his careful representations and descriptions of the characters and their (frequently subversive) behaviour.

5.3 ‘HEADMASTER AND LORD OF ALL HE SURVEYED’¹³⁷

According to Quigly (1982:28), the headmaster ‘of fiction, and often of memoirs as well, has had a wizened image, petty and pedantic where it is not foolish or cruel, the image of a man obsessed with timetables and house matches and the peg for his gown, with habit and detail, the repeated joke and the dreary ritual’. This image conveys the connotations implicit in a discourse which views schoolmasters as physically inept and psychologically weak. While this perception does not necessarily reflect, accurately, the character and habits of all, or even most masters, it nevertheless became a popular image in boys’ school fiction, one of the ‘*distorted pedagogues*’ referred to in Raven’s synopsis of the characteristic formula of works typical of this genre.

At first glance, ‘Henry Stagg, Headmaster and lord of all he surveyed’ (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:1), and referred to as Rudolph¹³⁸ by the boys, seems to fit this description. In fact, the book opens with an intimidating description of Mr Stagg’s opening prayer, spoken in Latin and conveying all the pomp and ceremony of a well-established tradition. The headmaster obviously relishes his position of authority and speaks with ‘fresh vigour, his fingers flexing ominously as he gripped the back of his chair at High Table’ (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:1). Morpurgo,

¹³⁷ Morpurgo ([1993] 2007:1).

¹³⁸ Mr Stagg’s nickname is possibly a play on his surname in that ‘Rudolph’ is, according to popular Western culture, the name of one of the reindeer (stags) that pull Father Christmas’s sleigh. This nickname sounds innocuous, suggesting that the headmaster is perhaps less dangerous than he appears.

however, manages to convey the monotony and dreariness of the scene by allowing the protagonist's – and hence the reader's – thoughts to wander into a flashback of the morning's events, a mental expedition which ends only with Mr Stagg's concluding 'Amen'.

Mr Stagg's stereotypical obsession with blind adherence to rules becomes obvious in the first chapter, in which he reprimands Christopher during his very first meal at Redlands for refusing to eat his 'rice-pudding skin' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:7):

"I don't know," Rudolph began, his voice full of acid menace. "I don't know what sort of home you have come from, what sort of school you have come from; but here at Redlands we do not lean across the table, we eat what is put in front of us, and we do not turn up our noses at Mrs Woolland's excellent rice pudding. 'Manners maketh man' is the motto of one of our great schools, and at Redlands we set great store by our manners, Christopher. Now, as this is your first meal with us I am prepared to turn a blind eye, but just this once. If I ever see you ..."

"I don't eat the skin, sir."¹³⁹ Christopher spoke quietly.

Not only is Mr Stagg's admiration for Britain's 'great schools' and his desire to emulate them made clear, but also his capacity for pettiness and a degree of cruelty, which is implicit in his 'acid' remarks concerning Christopher's background. Nevertheless, while all the initiated boys, as well as the staff, know that 'with Rudolf, there was safety only in silent, abject acceptance' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:9), Christopher's blatant refusal to obey does not bring about 'the massacre of the innocent' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:9) that everyone seems to expect. Rather, Rudolph's final course of action displays a dignity quite congruent with his level of authority, which serves, furthermore, to shed a rather

¹³⁹ The strong autobiographical basis of the story is made clear in Morpurgo's recollections of public school in which he explains the reason why he decided to run away (hence the title, 'My One and Only Great Escape', which features in the compilation entitled *Ten of the Best; School Stories with a Difference*):

It was the rice pudding that made me do it [run away]. Major Philips (Latin and Rugby) sitting at the end of my table told me I had to finish the slimy rice pudding skin I'd hidden under my spoon. To swallow while I was crying was almost impossible, but somehow I managed it, only to retch it up almost at once. Major Philips told me not to be 'childish'. I swallowed again and this time kept it down. This was the moment I made up my mind that I'd had enough, that I was going to run away, that nothing and no one would stop me. (Morpurgo 2002:150)

negative light on Christopher's continued disobedience. Nevertheless, the fact that everyone *seems to expect* the public humiliation and subjugation of the uninitiated boy suggests that the dominant discourse of power in the school upholds the headmaster's hierarchical right to enforce his authority in whichever way he deems necessary.

While this apparently stereotypical description constitutes the reader's first introduction to Mr Stagg – also referred to as 'His Majesty' by Matron – Morpurgo begins to describe very different aspects of the headmaster's character during the subsequent chapters. For example, when it falls to his lot to tell young Toby that the boy's grandmother has passed away, Mr Stagg cannot bring himself to utter the words which he knows will bring much pain to the boy. Eventually, it is the headmaster's wife, Prunella (rather unjustly nicknamed Cruella), who gently breaks the news to Toby, 'Jenkins, it's your grandmother, dear, she died, last night. I'm very sorry dear. So sorry' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:64).

Later in the novel, shortly after the messy skirmish with the village boys down at the river during which Toby's ear is badly torn and the headmaster's fishing rod (lent to Toby to distract him from his sorrow) is broken, Mr Stagg's treatment of the schoolboys is also unexpected in terms of a construction of headmasters as dogmatic disciplinarians (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:85):

"But you shouldn't have tangled with them, you shouldn't have got involved. That was stupid, stupid, do you hear me?" The tirade that was building suddenly stopped. Rudolph sighed and shook his head. "It makes me mad. This kind of thing, it makes me mad. It's not the rod. I don't mind so much about the rod, but I will not have my boys treated like this. I will not have it." And he walked away still muttering under his breath.

Toby could see that he meant it. Rudolph really did like them and Toby had never understood that in him before. He had a strange way of showing it sometimes.

Rudolph's reference to the schoolboys as 'my boys' and his heartfelt concern for them sheds another, much more positive, light on his character. By adding this dimension to his personality, Morpurgo succeeds in creating a much more

believable and agreeable persona than the text-book stereotype described by Quigly (cited at the beginning of this section).

Further insight into Mr Stagg's psychological makeup comes with the episode during which he considers it necessary to cane Toby for being party to Christopher's blasphemous pursuits. While Toby is waiting outside the headmaster's study for his turn to be punished, Mr Stagg's wife says to him "He doesn't mean it, you know. He doesn't enjoy it. It's for your own good" (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:178). Such comments suggest that Mr Stagg is not one of the ruthless disciplinarians who relish the opportunity to use corporal punishment on their charges and pride themselves on their 'level eye' and 'scientific' approach to caning.¹⁴⁰ Instead, he seems to regard it as an unpleasant responsibility which he must assume for the long-term benefit of the boys. In this respect, Mr Stagg's alternative construction of corporal punishment as a disagreeable, though necessary, disciplinary method is clearly different from the brutal discourse implicit in the ruthless flogging of boys that is purportedly enjoyed¹⁴¹ by masters in some traditional boys' school stories.

Further evidence of Mr Stagg's humanity comes just after Toby's caning, when Mr Stagg does not merely dismiss Toby, but actually apologises to the boy for having to take what he views to be necessary steps to prevent a recurrence of blatant blasphemy (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:179):

Rudolph walked over to the rolltop-desk and stood the cane in the corner. He turned round and sighed. There was a tremble in his voice. "I am sorry, Toby, particularly after yesterday, after your recent sad news, but you understand I hadn't any choice. You do understand that, don't you?"

Mr Stagg's obvious inward struggle and earnest attempt to justify his actions to Toby provide a refreshing change from the harsh, unrelenting autocrat who

¹⁴⁰ In *Stalky & Co.*, Kipling comments of the headmaster that 'when he caned he did it very *scientifically*, and the *execution of a hundred boys* would be epic – immense' (Kipling [1899] 1994:185; my emphases).

¹⁴¹ A disturbing, purportedly true account of Joseph Lancaster's habit of flogging boys 'when he was in good humour for his amusement' claims that his practice was 'to hug and caress and kiss [the boys] to induce them to consent to be flogged' (Honey 1977:203). Such behaviour suggests distinctly erotic overtones.

would have considered an apology beneath him and explanation of his actions to a guilty schoolboy quite unnecessary. As a result, Morpurgo's character, while outwardly displaying all the usual traits of the formulaic headmaster, actually subverts this discourse by proving himself to be inwardly compassionate towards the boys in their suffering and keenly empathetic to their struggles. By presenting this essentially alternative description of a compassionate, though strict headmaster, Morpurgo seems to hint at that the implied gross over-simplification and exaggerated narrow-mindedness of the (hardly credible) stereotypical fictional headmaster of traditional boys' school stories.

5.4 TAKING ONE'S GRUEL LIKE A MAN – CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND MANLINESS

As noted in Chapter Three, a boy's ability to handle a caning without any outward show of weakness is regarded as a measure of his strength of character in traditional boys' school stories that subscribe to a discourse which regards caning as 'normal' and inevitable. Excerpts such as the following from *His First Term* are typical (Finnemore [1909] 1953:69):

This was hard on Foulkes, for though pyjamas are a very convenient garment for sleeping in, they form a woefully slight defence against a stout cane in a strong hand. But Foulkes had heaps of pluck. He went over and took his gruel like a man. [...]

Foulkes said nothing. His lips were pressed together to keep up his name and fame for taking the whacking like a little man.

While this may be the predominant discourse in schoolboy fiction, one cannot help but wonder whether this is in any way a true reflection of the dominant discourse in the schools these stories represent. Indeed, Morpurgo's description of corporal punishment would seem to suggest otherwise. While the protagonist goes into Mr Stagg's study with 'new-found courage', Morpurgo's minute attention to detail evokes sympathy towards the boy despite his apparently weak response (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:179):

Rudolph tapped the arm of the leather chair with his cane. It didn't look much, long and thin and whippy, but Toby knew what it would feel like. He turned his eyes away from it deliberately, like he did at the dentist when he saw the drill. He knew what to do. He knelt on the elephant's foot, leant over, gripped the other arm of the chair, closed his eyes, stiffened himself and waited. [...] Rudolph was taking aim. Toby's whole body was suffused with a sudden prolonged and searing pain that only began to dissipate when he had stood up again and was rubbing himself, his legs trembling, his mouth full of tears.

Not only does Toby succumb to the unmanly display of tears, but he also discovers that he has unknowingly wet his pants during the ordeal. Such embarrassment would have been unthinkable for conventional boy heroes, especially one who is – like Toby – a member of the school's First Fifteen rugby team.

Morpurgo's graphic description of the scene could also be aimed primarily at educating his target audience in the discourse of corporal punishment. Indeed, to many contemporary school-going children, especially in the United Kingdom where the book was first published, this mode of punishment would already be completely foreign. The detailed portrayal may therefore be necessary for today's child-reader to fully appreciate the protagonist's suffering.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Roald Dahl's similarly graphic description of caning in his autobiographical short story, 'Lucky Break' skilfully draws the reader into the experience not only by recalling the minutiae of the ordeal, but also by actually placing the reader in the victim's shoes through the use of personal pronouns such as 'you' and 'your' (Dahl 1977:191):

I bent over. Then I waited. He always kept you waiting for about ten seconds, and that was when your legs began to shake. [...] I stared at the toe-caps of my black shoes and I told myself that any moment now this man was going to bash the cane into me so hard that the whole of my bottom would change colour. The welts were always very long, stretching right across both buttocks, blue-black with brilliant scarlet edges, and when you ran your fingers over them ever so gently afterwards, you could feel the corrugations. *Swish!...Crack!*

Then came the pain. It was unbelievable, unbearable, excruciating. It was as though someone had laid a white-hot poker across your backside and pressed hard. The second stroke would be coming soon and it was as much as you could do to stop putting your hands in the way to ward it off. It was the instinctive reaction. But if you did that, it would break your fingers. [...]

You tried not to cry out. Sometimes you couldn't help it. But whether you were able to remain silent or not, it was impossible to stop the tears. They poured down your cheeks in streams and dripped on to the carpet.

For uninitiated child readers, this detailed description, uncoloured by the discourse of courage which makes light of a caning by (in most cases) exaggerating the immense pluck of the victim,

While Toby's suffering is acute, Morpurgo does not fail to mention the compensations generally associated with caning. Toby contemplates the issue (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:67):

Given the choice, he decided on balance that he would prefer to have the cane. When you had the cane you had it with other people usually. You suffered together. You felt sick. It hurt and you cried. It was somehow simple and straightforward and something everyone had to go through.

Morpurgo ([1993] 2007:182) adds that, 'after any caning there was a natural solidarity amongst the boys. Almost everybody at the school had climbed the Bloody Steps and faced the leather chair. They knew what it was like, what Toby and Hunter must be feeling; and whilst there was little or no positive sympathy, most had the grace to leave them alone'. The portrayal of corporal punishment as a unifying element between the boys is unusual and not typical of historical boys' school stories, although some publications, such as Kipling's controversial *Stalky & Co.* do contain episodes that carry similar connotations. Morpurgo returns to this motif in his description of the new understanding which develops between Toby and Hunter shortly after their beating (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:186):

Toby had never seen Hunter cry before, he didn't know he could.

"And you've got a sore bum," said Toby, "and I've got a sore bum." Hunter looked at Toby and laughed through his tears. [...] Taken over by their laughter and tears they rolled in the straw until they were too exhausted to laugh or cry any more.

Not only does Morpurgo subvert the dominant discourse of manliness somewhat by allowing the leading characters to submit to the indignity of tears, but he also intimates that their mutual suffering and humiliation forms the basis of the unlikely friendship between Toby and Hunter, who is the national champion for javelin, 'Captain of School and Captain of just about everything else too', and who looks like 'a Greek warrior out of the history books' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:22).

paints a vivid picture of the kind of punishment thousands of British schoolboys were forced to endure.

Instead of using depictions of severe corporal punishment to promote and applaud 'stiff-upper-lippery' (Honey 1977:192), the control over the emotions so frequently associated with the vindication of desirable manliness in the protagonist, Morpurgo's approach seems to challenge the assumptions implicit in such representations. This subversion of the norm suggests that the spontaneous expression of feelings (to which Toby frequently succumbs) need not necessarily negate masculinity. Instead, it challenges the dominant discourses of emotionally restrained masculinity and corporal punishment as a desirable means of vindicating that masculinity in traditional boys' school stories.

5.5 THE MICROCOSM VERSUS THE MACROCOSM – OF 'OIKS' AND 'TOFFS': CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS IN *THE WAR OF JENKINS' EAR*

In 1912, Arthur Ponsonby expressed his concern that schoolboys left the microcosm of their respective public schools 'saturated with class feeling' (cited in Quigly 1982:9). While acknowledging the validity of this statement, Quigly suggests that the public school system itself was not solely, or even mostly, to blame for this, as 'any class opinion or attitude [...] is part of you, grafted onto your skin shortly after birth' (Atkins in Quigly 1982:9). In other words, public schoolboys would arrive for their first day of school with certain class prejudices and opinions already instilled in them. What the school environment did (or did not do) to address these issues is perhaps a more relevant concern. This was further complicated by the fact that public schools constituted, by their very exclusivity, a concrete representation of the class divide.

During an interview with Ilene Cooper (1996:1), Morpurgo claimed that he received his first introduction to 'class war'¹⁴³ at school:

The schoolboys and the village boys had fights and difficulties; walking along cow paths, we'd hurl insults at each other. It was an indication that there were

¹⁴³ In *The Flying Classroom* by Erich Kästner, first translated into English from German and published in Britain in 1934, one of the public school boys comments on the 'traditional' aspect of class wars between public schoolboys and the town boys (Kästner [1934] 1984:44): 'There's been a feud between us and the chaps at the Secondary School since prehistoric times. It was just the same, so I've heard, ten years ago. [...] All the boys do is carry on the tradition'.

people out there who didn't like you because of the way you spoke, and we didn't like them either. And while things have changed since the 1950's, class still seems to me to be a cancer that riddles our society.

Early in *The War of Jenkins' Ear*, a prefect named Porter displays his class bias when he derisively labels both Wanda and Christopher¹⁴⁴ 'oiks', a term at once accusatory and derogatory. Nevertheless, such verbal abuse little prepares the reader for the horror of the full-blown physical war which erupts between the 'oiks' and the 'toffs' at the river which forms the boundary to the school grounds. In this pivotal scene, Toby glances at his friends and notices that their faces 'were contorted with fury, their eyes blazing, their feet stamping, their fists punching the air' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:80). Although at one point it seems as if a truce might be achieved, and the town boys agree to retreat, one of the Redlands boys attacks Benjie while Benjie's back is turned. This base and cowardly act finally causes the pent-up anger and mutual revulsion to break out (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:81):

Toby ducked but was hit on his neck, and then he found himself throwing stones with everyone else. They threw anything that came to hand, flotsam from the river, tin cans, clods of earth, sand, anything. When one of the village boys went down screaming and clutching his face a whooping cheer went up from the Redlands bank and the barrage from both sides intensified until both sides were being hit so often that they were forced to back away out of range.

Through Toby's questionable behaviour, Morpurgo seems to be commenting on the overwhelming power of mob prejudice. Of all the Redlands boys, Toby is the one who knows most certainly that he was initially in the wrong and yet he is unable to stand up against his peers in order to prevent further bloodshed.

By contrast, in the very midst of the fray, Christopher arrives and attempts to put an end to the fighting single-handedly. As a character, this is perhaps the moment when his unusual conviction of his supposed identity as the 'second Jesus' is put to the greatest test. In his fervent desire to bring about peace,

¹⁴⁴ Porter calls Christopher an 'oik' because of his background (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:36): "It's always the same with your kind," Porter sneered. "You're an oik, aren't you?" and he pushed Christopher in the chest. "Come from an oik's school, didn't you?"

Christopher courageously wades out into the middle of the river unarmed, appealing to both sides to drop their stones. His bravery in the face of the risk of personal injury is admirable and his sincerity cannot be denied (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:82): ‘Christopher looked around him for a moment at the battle and Toby saw there were tears running down his face. He ran forward to the river’s edge. “Stop it! Stop it!” he cried. He was wading out into the river, the stones falling all around him.’¹⁴⁵

Christopher’s brave actions warrant a discussion of the discourse of courage which permeates the text. Because of Christopher’s disinclination to tackle in a rugby game, Porter accuses Christopher of being a coward on the rugby field, a locus which is (in boys’ school stories, at least) traditionally linked to a symbolic validation of courage in the face of opposition. For traditional boy protagonists, failure to prove one’s pluck under the daunting conditions created by the game usually translates into an inevitable lack of resolve in all other matters. This is not, however, the case with Christopher. By contrast, when it comes to the courage required to proclaim his personal faith and act according to his religious convictions, Christopher is capable of laudable bravery.

The acknowledgement of this kind of courage is not, however, entirely revolutionary, as *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* contains notable references to the conscientious fortitude of the frail new boy, Arthur, who is, according to Tom’s predictions, ‘afraid of wet feet, and always getting laughed at, and called Molly or

¹⁴⁵ With specific reference to the alleged similarities between his school story and Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, Morpurgo comments (Cooper 1996:2): ‘A British reviewer said that *The War of Jenkins’ Ear* had echoes of *Lord of the Flies*. I was very pleased by that because it’s a book I’ve long admired. When you read *Lord of the Flies* it sends permanent shivers down your spine.’ This scene in particular reminds one of the brutal, sacrificial episode in *Lord of the Flies* (1954) in which Simon (whose last words may be interpreted as a subtle allusion to a Christian discourse of non-violence) is murdered (Golding [1954] 1996:188):

Simon was crying out something about a dead man on a hill.

“Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood! Do him in!”

The sticks fell and the mouth of the new circle crunched and screamed. The beast [Simon] was on its knees in the centre, its arms folded over its face. It was crying out against the abominable noise something about a body on the hill.

Although the similarities between the two books are compelling and warrant further investigation, these are not explored in this study, because Golding’s novel is not strictly a school story.

Jenny, or some derogatory feminine nickname' (Hughes [1857] 1971:171). In describing Arthur's behaviour on his first night at Rugby, Hughes makes particular mention of the sincerity with which the boy prays before bedtime, commenting that '[i]t was *no light act of courage* in those days, my dear boys, for a little fellow to say his prayers publicly, even at Rugby' (Hughes [1857] 1971:177; my emphases). Thus, Hughes emphasises and commends the discourse of courage which finds expression in the unwavering resolve to act according to one's convictions. In this respect, Christopher's acts of religious observance seem no less sincere: 'Christopher seemed to know all the hymns and followed the service avidly in his prayer book. He prayed *properly* – with his eyes closed, Toby noticed – *as if he was really praying*. Toby envied him that' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:38; my emphases).

The passion and commitment implicit in Christopher's actions are echoed in the prayer he utters shortly after Toby has confirmed his belief in Christopher as 'the Son of God, the second Jesus'. Kneeling in a little makeshift 'chapel' constructed out of rhododendron leaves and logs from the spinney, Christopher expresses his concerns for humanity (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:57):

"Dear God, dear Father, I see all around me injustice, hunger, disease. I see people fighting each other all over the earth. Misery multiplies as greed multiplies. We have forgotten you. The Gospel of the Son of God is the same as it always was, that we should love one another. Only then will there be peace and joy on this earth."

From this extract it is clear that, although his claims to divinity are deeply disturbing, Christopher's pacifist doctrine concerning class prejudice has a firm Scriptural basis. Jesus says in Matthew 5:¹⁴⁶

43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

¹⁴⁶ All Biblical quotes in this chapter are drawn from the Authorised King James Version ([1611] 1982).

45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

Morpurgo confirms that one of his intentions with *The War of Jenkins' Ear* was to address what he refers to as 'the problem' of the British class system (Cooper 1996:2). His startling approach to this issue serves to point out to the reader, indirectly, that any form of class prejudice and discrimination does not, and cannot, form a legitimate part of Christian discourse.

In his inspiring speech that finally manages to sway the schoolboys in favour of peace, Christopher sums up what he sees as the only viable solution to the class war, based on the principles of a Christian discourse of pacifism (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:164):

"All we have to do is put down our stones and they'll put down theirs. We throw away our spears, they'll throw away theirs. We stop hating them, they'll stop hating us. It's simple. One of us has to offer a hand of friendship across the river. One gesture of goodwill, that's all it'll take and this war will be over with. And if we can do it here in this place, if we can make a peace between us then it can be done everywhere and there'll be no more war, no more hate."

Christopher's stirring and logical argument stands in direct opposition to Hughes's declaration in his pioneer boys' school story that he is 'dead against crying peace when there is no peace, and *isn't meant to be*. I'm as sorry as any man to see folk fighting the wrong people and the wrong things, but I'd a deal sooner see *them doing that*, than that they should have no fight in them' (Hughes [1857] 1971:219; my emphases). Because of the directly oppositional status of Christopher's discursive approach to violence in relation to the dominant discourse implicit in Hughes's anti-pacifist remarks, one can clearly identify Christopher's discourse as emergent in the context of historical boys' school stories.

5.6 CHRISTIAN DISCOURSES IN BOYS' PUBLIC SCHOOL FICTION

'*Benedicat nobis Omnipotens Deus ...*' – the opening words of the novel situate the narrative clearly in a school that claims a Christian ethos. However, the use of a Latin text seems to convey a merely outward image of piety and Morpurgo subtly hints at the ritualised, automatic nature of the religious practices at Redlands by allowing no clear visual break between the end of the headmaster's pompous prayer and the standard menu which follows. By means of clever lexical placement, Morpurgo manages to relegate the religious service to its actual position in the minds of the boys – simply another part of the daily routine (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:4): "*Per Jesum Christum dominum nostrum. Amen.*" Shepherd's pie, cabbage, and after that it would be rice pudding.'

Anthony Buckeridge raises a similar issue in *Jennings Goes to School*, first published in 1950, in which he highlights the spiritual futility of Latin prayers in English schools (Buckeridge [1950] 1991:13):

"I say, Bod, there's a new bloke here who wants to know what the grace means in English. You were first in Latin last term; you ought to know."

Temple, alias Bod, considered. When one is first in Latin, it doesn't do to confess ignorance. "Well," he said with an authoritative air, "when they say it before meals it means something like 'come and get it', and after meals it means 'you've had it'." And having given the ignorant newcomers the benefit of his learning, he returned to his shepherd's pie.

Despite the perceived impotence of the ritual, Mr Stagg's prayer which, loosely translated, implores the 'Almighty God' to bless the boys and teachers in the year ahead 'through Jesus Christ our Lord', rather ominously sets the tone for the religious concerns which pervade the book. However, although Morpurgo deals extensively with the notion of faith and the power of conviction, the unusual, and frequently ambiguous, storyline prevents the tone from ever becoming 'preachy' or overtly didactic. In fact, even at the end of the story, there is no clear, authorial indication of which religious discourse functions as 'true' – the personal revelation claimed by Christopher, or the institutionalised Christianity embraced

by the school. Such ambiguity is a complete departure from the explicit definition of purportedly desirable religious discourse in traditional boys' school stories.

The majority of literal and implied Scriptural references appear in connection with Simon Christopher, the new boy who claims to have spiritual visitations in which he hears voices, and sometimes even sees Jesus face to face, or so he says (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:46):

“He [Jesus] tells me that I am him reincarnated, come back. I am Jesus, and like he did before me I have to try to save the world. And today he told me that the time has come, that I have to start my work right away and with you [Toby] at my side. You will be my Peter, my Rock, my first disciple.”

Although Christopher's assertions at first appear to be blatant blasphemy and, to say the least, highly unlikely, it is interesting that Morpurgo claims to have based much of the narrative on personal experience¹⁴⁷ (Cooper 1996:2):

There was another memory that was hovering around inside my head. At my school, one of the boys gathered a group around him, including me, and we all believed that this boy had healing powers. We had a little camp in the park and set ourselves apart from other people. Eventually, we were discovered and then beaten for our blasphemy. I always remembered this boy, so I incorporated a Christ-like figure into the story.

The inclusion of a 'Christ-like figure' in a boys' story is not new, as it largely thanks to the devout George Arthur's courageous proclamation of his beliefs that the legendary Tom Brown manages to conquer 'his own coward spirit' and reaffirm his belief in the Christian faith (Hughes [1857] 1971:179). Morpurgo's treatment of this kind of character, while having some things in common with its prototype, nevertheless differs greatly from Hughes's extremely didactic approach.

Morpurgo's initial concept of the driving force behind Christopher's character was that he had been sent to a school which he did not wish to attend and he would

¹⁴⁷ The autobiographical aspect of Morpurgo's story would, to a certain extent, account for his intimate and plausible description of Toby's inward struggle to establish and sustain his faith in the face of opposition.

try his best to get out. First, he tries to run away, but then, as he is simply brought back to the place he detests, he concentrates his energies on getting himself expelled. 'My theory was that if he was a con man, he was doing things that would get him kicked out of the school. So, one original possibility was that he went home and said, "Yeah, I've done it"' (Cooper 1996:2).

Morpurgo certainly equips Christopher with everything he would need if he were indeed a fraud. Apart from above-average intelligence which enables him to excel in class, and the gift of the gab which enables him to express his thoughts and their meanings in carefully constructed sentences, Christopher's most exceptional advantage lies in his knowledge of the Bible and, more specifically, the teachings of Jesus, which he uses, selectively, to support his own version of pacifist Christian discourse. In fact, 'he could quote the prophecies of Isaiah and many of the Proverbs. He knew Psalm 23 and the Sermon on the Mount by heart' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:32). Such knowledge would certainly help Christopher in his attempt to portray a divine understanding of God's word (similar to Christ in the temple at the age of twelve) and, in so doing, convince others of his inherent divinity, thus gathering disciples to himself. Christopher also possesses the knack of making perfectly coincidental happenings appear to be fore-ordained miracles that supposedly prove his alleged identity.

Although an objective reader may find reasonable explanations for the apparent miracles performed by Christopher, Morpurgo (Cooper 1996:2) comments that during the writing process, he actually came to believe Christopher's assertions despite his original intentions:

As I wrote the story, I was swept along the same wave. Just like Toby, I wanted to believe. That's why writing the end of the book was so tricky. I didn't want to do anything that would tie the story up with a nice little ribbon. At the end of the book, I desperately wanted Christopher to be who he said he was, but I also wanted to leave the possibilities open.

Thus, despite Morpurgo's initial purpose, the author (perhaps disingenuously) claims that Christopher's character took on a life of its own and manipulated the narrative accordingly.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, the nature of Christopher's influence on Toby is rather uncertain, in that it is neither entirely good, nor entirely bad. While being guilty of what Mr Stagg calls blatant blasphemy, Christopher reprimands his peers for using more common forms of blasphemy. He frequently reprimands those around him for using Jesus' name in vain (see Morpurgo [1993] 2007:36, 84), yet, using the Lord's name in vain is precisely the charge laid against Christopher and his followers by Holy Jo (the Divinity master) in the expulsion scene. Perhaps one of the most disturbing examples of Christopher's alleged blasphemy is when he quotes Jesus' words concerning the mystical relationship between Christ and the believer ('At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you', John 14 Verse 20) and applies them to the process of becoming blood brothers. Even Toby, despite the excitement of new-found faith, feels uncomfortable with Christopher's actions (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:59):

Before he knew it, Christopher was pressing their two fingers together. 'Blood brothers for ever,' he said. And when Toby looked up into his eyes he found he could not look away. 'You are in me,' said Christopher, 'and I am in you.' [...]

'We'd better be getting back,' said Toby, trying to put a brave face on it. 'They'll put us in detention else.' Suddenly he wanted to be gone, to be out of this place, to be free of Christopher, but he knew somehow he never could be.

Mr Stagg, too, is filled with righteous anger at what he sees to be Christopher's undisguised and presumptuous application of Jesus' words during the boy's public interrogation. In response to the headmaster's question – 'You're the one, you're the new Jesus, are you, the Son of God?' – Christopher merely replies, 'Your words, sir, not mine' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:172). The blasphemy of his enigmatic answer lies in the fact that Christopher is likening his present position

¹⁴⁸ The idea of a fictional character taking on a life of its own and manipulating the narrative constitutes part of a much-debated discourse of art and creativity. Morpurgo states (Cooper 1996:2): '[A]s I wrote the book, it began to take on a life of its own. The characters took the story where it was going. I have found that is what happens with the books that really work. I suppose now I think Christopher is out there doing some extraordinary work, living for his principles.'

to that of Jesus when he stood before Pontius Pilate. In describing this historical event, Luke 23 Verse 3, says: 'And Pilate asked him saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it.' The connotation is clear and offensive to the adult characters in the novel who claim Christianity as their religion.

Yet, the claims to divinity set aside, there are some similarities between Jesus' trial and the public tribunal at Redlands. Both the accused are punished for believing in their particular supernatural callings and not for any physical crimes besides that of alleged blasphemy. Christopher's refusal to deny his beliefs seems sincere (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:173):

"It's my voices who tell me who I am, sir, and my voices are real. I have not dreamt them, I have not made them up. They say I am Jesus and I believe them."

"Do you know, Christopher, do you know what you are saying? Do you realise that if you'd said that just a few hundred years ago they'd have burnt you at the stake?"

"Yes, sir," said Christopher, "and a few hundred years before that they'd have crucified me."

The logic of Christopher's argument is clear and seems confirmed when Mr Stagg follows the only course of action he sees open to him. Given the time and the place, he does the worst he can do to a boy who dares to challenge the established, dominant discourse with an alternative¹⁴⁹ – he submits Christopher to the disgrace of public expulsion.

Furthermore, the arguable injustice of Mr Stagg's actions becomes more pronounced when one considers the positive effect that Christopher's influence

¹⁴⁹ The similarities between the two public trials are highlighted when one considers Father Raymond E. Brown's remarks concerning Christ's interrogation, which are cited in an article by Kenneth L. Woodward in *Newsweek* (1994:43): 'Jesus was widely seen as a disturber of the religious structures of his time. Were Jesus to appear in our own day, he would probably be arrested and tried again. Most of those finding him guilty would identify themselves as Christians and think they were rejecting an impostor.' In defining the grounds upon which Jesus was crucified, Brown observes that one of the contributing factors was that 'Jesus was considered a blasphemer. I think he was seen as arrogant in making claims that belong to God alone' (cited in Woodward 1994:41).

has brought about in the school. Not only has he almost single-handedly managed to stem the tide of malice between the 'oiks' and the 'toffs', but he has also presented the schoolboys with a workable and morally acceptable alternative to their war-loving tendencies.

In addition, his self-appointed role as peace-maker has even made an impact on the relationships between the schoolboys themselves. Shortly after his first rugby practice, Christopher refuses to accept another boy's challenge to fight, a decision which would be regarded as weak and cowardly from a 'muscular Christianity' perspective. Hughes ([1857] 1971:232) makes his standpoint concerning this issue clear in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*: 'But don't say "No" [to a challenge] because you fear a licking, and say or think it's because you fear God, for that's neither Christian nor honest. And if you do fight, fight it out; and don't give in while you can stand and see.'

Christopher justifies his decision not to fight by claiming that the use of force is actually a 'sign of weakness' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:36): 'Think about it. Just because you knock someone down, doesn't make you right, does it? You can hit me if you like. Whatever you do I won't hit you back, so there really isn't any point in starting anything, is there?' Instead of placing Christopher in a negative light as a 'funk', Christopher's statement actually establishes him as a true contender for the gospel of peace as illustrated by Jesus (Matthew 5):

38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Since this Scriptural extract appears in the Sermon on the Mount, which Christopher can recite from memory, it is almost certain that he is using Christ's words as a basis for his argument. Further contemplation of this issue raises the inevitable question of whether – as Christopher's response differs so completely from Hughes's recommendations – the discourse of so-called 'muscular Christianity' is actually inherently Christian.

Moreover, Morpurgo does not subsequently lay this theme to rest, but applies it in an unusual way in respect of contact sport. Although both Toby and Hunter experience almost stereotypical exhilaration and enjoyment on the rugby field,¹⁵⁰ Christopher sheds a different light on the tactics employed in the sport. Although he easily outruns the opposition and manages to score a try during a practice session, Christopher refuses point blank to tackle anyone in order to obtain the ball. When Porter, the school bully, accuses him of being a coward, he replies, 'I just don't want to tackle, that's all. There's no point in hurting someone, not if you don't have to' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:35). Once again, a traditionally acceptable aspect of boys' school stories is being weighed against a pacifist discourse and purportedly found wanting.

Nevertheless, the balance can swing both ways. Despite the Scriptural basis of many of Christopher's statements, the discourse of divinity which he has constructed and to which he so resolutely clings also serves to disprove his own claim to divinity. Jesus' own words constitute Christopher's condemnation (Matthew 24):

23 Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Occasionally, the narrative also contains subtle hints that discount Christopher's assumed role as the Son of God. One of these instances occurs shortly after Christopher tells Toby about his vision (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:45):

¹⁵⁰ In the case of Toby and Hunter, Morpurgo's subversion of the dominant discourse of sport consists in causing these two talented players to view their brilliant performances on the rugby field as bound up in their joint discipleship of Christopher. We are told:

The secret alliance, the growing bond between Hunter and Toby seemed to affect even their partnership on the rugby field. [...] they played with an intuitive understanding that surprised and delighted Mr Price and everyone else who saw them. No signals seemed to be needed, no words. A glance between them, and Toby would seem to know what Hunter had in mind, whether he was going blind-side, or open, whether he was dropping a goal. [...] Toby revelled in the joy of it and basked in the admiration that came their way after each game. (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:138.)

[B]y the time he'd followed him out Christopher was already half way down Woody Hill, hands deep in his boilersuit pockets. "You've got your hands in your pockets. Only prefects are allowed!" He did not reply and he didn't take his hands out of his pockets either.

Christopher's blatant and repeated disobedience to rules and regulations is distinctly unlike the account of Jesus' behaviour as it is described in Hebrews 5 Verse 8: 'Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.' At times, therefore, there is an authorial insinuation that Christopher is perhaps not who he claims to be.

5.7 RICE PUDDING AND RESISTANCE – CHRISTOPHER'S RESPONSE

Shortly after the 'rice-pudding skin' episode, Toby asks Christopher, "Would you have eaten it, in the end I mean?". Christopher's response is significant: "No, [...] 'Course not. He'd have *given in*. They always do *in the end*" (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:15; my emphases). Apart from identifying Christopher as a manipulative child who is accustomed to having his own way, this reply suggests that Christopher is acutely aware of the power implicit in resistance.

According to Foucault, power is not just a negative force but a productive one and where there is power, there is resistance (Foucault 1997b:167). In this case, Christopher is resisting Mr Stagg's exercise of power to force the boy into doing what he does not wish to do. The headmaster's attempt to subjugate Christopher and break down his resistance is delineated in his resolve to teach the boy 'an early lesson and it is this. Here you *will do* what you are told to do, not what you feel like doing, [...] *whether you like it or not* and without complaint' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:8; my emphases).

Christopher's refusal to obey the headmaster marks the starting point of his resistance – 'to say no is the minimum form of resistance' (Foucault 1997b:168) – while his failed attempt at running away is indicative of his desire to break out of the overbearing discursive practices that characterise the boys' public school.

These actions do not, however, have the desired effect and Christopher is brought back to school and made to promise that he will never attempt to run away again, a promise which, indeed, he does not break.

But Christopher is not satisfied. He does not wish to remain at the school and although he appears, outwardly, to be conforming to the strictures enforced by the school system, his resistance takes on another dimension. According to Foucault (1997b:168), greater resistance involves the *creation* of an *alternative discourse* by the ‘dominated subject’. In *The War of Jenkins’ Ear*, Christopher’s actions seem to take this principle to the extreme.

In order to resist the power vested in the school hierarchy, Christopher creates, for himself and his disciples, an alternative discourse of divinity (“I am Jesus, [...] I have to try to save the world” (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:46)) that is in direct opposition to the discourse of divinity embraced by the school authorities (this is implicit in their description of Christopher’s claims as blasphemous). Christopher maintains his resistance publicly by refusing to recant and, in so doing, gains his objective of leaving the school. The headmaster and Christopher’s mother eventually *give in* to the boy’s subtle acts of resistance.

This reading obviously assumes that Christopher is not the spiritual being he claims to be – a point which is never resolved in the novel. Nevertheless, Christopher’s response to his expulsion does suggest a triumph of the oppressed over the oppressor (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:180; my emphases):

... Christopher was seen to walk alone to the car with his suitcase. He looked up once at the [school] building, then at the dining hall window. Toby couldn’t be sure of it because he was some distance away, but Christopher’s face seemed suddenly different, open, *happy* and *released*. [...] Christopher was gone.
“Jesus Christ *has missed his rice pudding*”...

In effect, the creation and perpetuation of Christopher’s alternative discourse of divinity has brought about his symbolic freedom from perceived oppression – he will never again be forced to eat ‘the rice-pudding skin’.

5.8 CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, it is evident that Michael Morpurgo has given very careful thought to the discourses that govern historical boys' school fiction and the motifs which traditionally dominate the genre. His genius for blending the old with the new, the familiar with the unfamiliar and the generally accepted with the revolutionary is a defining characteristic of most of his novels, and one which he uses to great effect in *The War of Jenkins' Ear*. As Foucault ([1972] 2003:23) points out, 'tradition enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence, and to transfer its merit to originality, to genius, to the decisions proper to individuals'. Conversely, the new serves to pin down the tradition and place it in hypothetical suspension where it can be scrutinised and reassessed.

In this novel, Morpurgo's originality and genius finds expression in his unconventional treatment of several motifs typical of boys' school stories. For example, his unusual depiction of the protagonist's reaction to caning, as well as Christopher's pacifist approach to rugby and fighting signify a very different discourse of manliness to the dominant discourse of manliness that is portrayed through the actions of historical schoolboy heroes. As Toby's girlfriend, Wanda, observes about him, "You're funny, [...] Sometimes you're like a little kid, and then you're like a *real man*" (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:158; my emphasis). Wanda's remarks indicate a sense of perplexity, as if she is not quite able to align Toby with her perceived discourse of *real* manliness, one which is, perhaps, similar to the rugged, emotionally disciplined discourse constructed in traditional boys' school stories. Morpurgo's construction of boyhood, however, suggests the possibility that qualities such as courage and manliness may be expressed and identified in a variety of ways, such as publicly proclaiming one's personal beliefs or jeopardising one's own safety in the interests of peace. Such assertions signify the influence of an alternative discourse of manliness in the novel.

Moreover, Morpurgo's conscious juxtaposition of the dominant discourse of 'muscular Christianity' against an alternative discourse of pacifist Christianity

leads the reader to reconsider, not only the governing values, but also the actual origin, the supporting discourse, of 'muscular Christianity'. In other words, by revisiting the motifs which are often central to boys' school stories in daring and subversive ways, Morpurgo succeeds in voicing a subtle, yet clear and thought-provoking indictment of the previously accepted principles and moral codes typical of the genre.

Hence, the distinct contrast between the Christian discourse propagated by Christopher (particularly in respect of fighting and class prejudice) and the ideals of 'muscular Christianity' circulated in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* causes Thomas Hughes's perception of the boys' public school as 'a noble institution for the training of *Christian Englishmen*'¹⁵¹ (Hughes [1857] 1971:134; my emphasis) to be called into question by the very values which underpin the previously dominant 'traditional' discourse.

In effect, Morpurgo's inclusion of alternative discourses of manliness, courage, corporal punishment, Christianity and power in the narrative allows for the representation and subsequent contemplation of various constructions of

¹⁵¹ As mentioned in Chapter Three, in his autobiographical *Boy: Tales of Childhood*, Roald Dahl, questions the compatibility of Christian discourses with the tradition of caning so common in boys' public schools. He also raises the issue in 'Lucky Break' (Dahl 1977:193) where he recalls that

The beatings at Repton were more fierce and more frequent than anything I had yet experienced. And do not think for one moment that the future Archbishop of Canterbury [who was headmaster at the time] objected to these squalid exercises. He rolled up his sleeves and joined in with gusto. His were the bad ones, the really terrifying occasions. Some of the beatings administered by this Man of God, this future Head of the Church of England, were very brutal. To my certain knowledge he once had to produce a basin of water, a sponge and a towel so that the victim could wash away the blood afterwards. No joke, that. Shades of the Spanish Inquisition.

It is evident from this extract (as well as from the similar one quoted in Chapter Three) that, instead of transforming Dahl into a Christian Englishman, his experiences at public school actually caused him to seriously question the doctrines of Christianity as they were represented to him by the actions of those who were purportedly ordained to promote them.

In a similar vein, in a short story published as part of her feminist short story collection, *School Daze*, Ger Duffy (1992:157) describes the apparent cruelty of Sister Ignatius, a nun and teacher at a Catholic girls' school that contributes to the character Ann Doyle's eventual rejection of Christianity. The short story is called 'First Communion':

In the run-up to the big day [catechism examination], Sr. Ignatius grew more and more excited. Hardly a day passed without everyone in the class receiving a slap. [...] The Bracken twins created a diversion by fainting simultaneously and, when they recovered, vomiting all over their jumpers. Sr. Ignatius scattered sawdust at their feet. Although it was cold, they had to stand in their blouses, in front of the class, dishonoured.

boyhood hitherto denied by the counterpart dominant discourses found in historical boys' school fiction. The protagonist's actions and reactions are therefore no longer governed by strict adherence to a moral code which – though previously largely uncontested – is proven to be inherently contradictory. Instead, the fictional boy is left to explore the realm of personal faith in order to establish his own sense of identity.

The inconclusive nature of the novel, moreover, leaves one with a distinct sense of unease. Although Morpurgo admits (as mentioned earlier) that he specifically 'didn't want to do anything that would tie the story up with a nice little ribbon' (in Cooper 1996:2), he makes this statement with direct reference to the uncertainty surrounding Christopher's true identity. But this is not the only ambiguous issue. Accustomed as I have become to boys' school stories that unequivocally spell out the fundamentals of boys' public school 'truth', Morpurgo's treatment of issues central to the schoolboy experience left me with no final answers, no clear indication of the way an ideal British boy should think and behave.

In fact, is there such a thing as an ideal at all? By the end of the novel, we have witnessed the public expulsion from an ostensibly Christian institution of an academically gifted boy who gains the respect and confidence of the Captain of the school and his peers by apparently modelling his actions and beliefs on the teachings of Christ. Two honest, strong members of the First Fifteen dissolve into tears after a caning and fighting is represented as sign of moral cowardice. There is obvious confusion. Gone is the comfortable confidence of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in which Hughes ([1857] 1971:231) clearly delineates the 'natural and English way' and, with apparent incredulity, rhetorically enquires, 'What substitute is there, amongst any nation under the sun? What would you like to see take its place?'

Thus, by questioning (and, at times, even subverting) the dominant discourses of traditional boys' school stories, Morpurgo's work succeeds in disturbing 'the tranquillity with which [such discourses] are accepted' (Foucault [1972] 2003:28),

thereby causing them to remain in a kind of suspense, pending reassessment. But the final redefinition of boys' school truth does not come. Both the reader and the boy are left to formulate their own ideas, to negotiate their own way through the maze of conflicting discourses on offer.

In this sense, the novel's title, *The War of Jenkins' Ear*, is perhaps symbolic. The *war* consists in determining which discourses the protagonist will embrace or lend his *ear* to. On one hand, one could call this liberated open-mindedness; on the other hand, one could call it unmitigated bewilderment. Unlike the confident, self-assured boy hero of the past, Morpurgo's schoolboy is portrayed as a perplexed protagonist looking 'for some proof of anything that would help him make up his mind' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:35).

CHAPTER SIX

‘HELL’S VIEW’: CONSTRUCTIONS OF BOYHOOD IN VAN DE RUIT’S SOUTH AFRICAN BOYS’ SCHOOL STORIES

“I tell you, Spud, this place is like an insane asylum! There are maniacs in this place – even our headmaster’s a maniac! Don’t you feel it too? It’s like there’s always someone out to get you, or laugh at you or make you feel like an idiot or a coward or something...”

(Van de Ruit 2005:239)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In its editorial review, *Best Life* magazine (which sports the slogan ‘what matters to men’) described *Spud* as a ‘rare book that men and their sons can laugh about together’ (my emphases).¹⁵² I was considerably surprised by this description and my initial response was that it is rather the particular father-son relationship that the comment alludes to that is *rare*. But then, I am not a father, and my sons are still blissfully pre-adolescent – so I am perhaps ill-qualified to judge. However, I have no trouble imagining a group of teenage boys sniggering at the lewd passages¹⁵³ – in much the same way that the Crazy Eight discuss their dodgy escapades in the dormitory after lights-out.

In fact, judging by the way boys are apparently ‘snapping up copies’ (Von Klemperer 2007:1) of the first two books, Van de Ruit’s novels seem to have struck a chord with this particular age group. According to Guy Pearson, Rector of Michaelhouse, ninety per cent of the potential pupils he interviews (aged twelve and above) ‘have read [*Spud*] and love it’ (Von Klemperer 2007:1). Moreover, some high schools have introduced *Spud* as a setwork book. Such circumstances, as well as the consideration that the book is published by the

¹⁵² amazon.com

¹⁵³ Although this is largely a matter of taste, I strongly disagree with the view published in the *Cape Argus* which asserts that the book ‘is never vulgar’ (Wilson 2005:2).

Penguin Young Reader Group contribute to the choice to include Van de Ruit's schoolboy novels as primary texts in this study.¹⁵⁴

Since its publication in 2005, *Spud: A Wickedly¹⁵⁵ Funny Novel* has enjoyed phenomenal success. The author, John van de Ruit – a highly acclaimed South African actor and playwright – comments: 'I knew I had a story in me that I wanted to tell, but *Spud's* [sic] success was an enormous surprise' (Lee 2006:2).¹⁵⁶ The book, which won the 2006 Booksellers' Choice Award, has been described as 'outrageously funny' (Von Klemperer 2005:1), 'hysterical' (Lee 2006:1), and 'irresistible' (Ntabeni 2006:1). Its sequel, *Spud – The Madness Continues... (2007)*,¹⁵⁷ follows firmly in its predecessor's footsteps and seamlessly continues the story of young scholarship student, John Milton (nicknamed 'Spud' because of the delayed onset of puberty), at an elite private boys' school in Kwazulu-Natal.¹⁵⁸ (The third instalment in this series, *Spud – Learning to Fly*, was released on 10 June 2009. Although the latest novel

¹⁵⁴ Despite these considerations, the issue of the target audience is admittedly debatable. While a considerable amount of the situational humour may appeal to teenage readers, such as the evident obsession with bodily functions, the presumably satirical elements and the author's classification of the first book as a 'novel' might indicate an older intended readership. If this is assumed, the novels may perhaps be interpreted as a form of satire somewhat akin to that found in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, including their obvious fixation with bodily function and excremental obsessions which are evident in the frequent reference to burping, farting and other kinds of bodily function in the novels.

¹⁵⁵ Van de Ruit's repeated use of the term 'wicked' in varying contexts confirms that it is mainly intended to convey the conversational tone of teenage slang, a stylistic device on which authors of early school stories, such as Angela Brazil, were much criticised (Cadogan & Craig 1986:117), but which became increasingly popular with the 'realistic' children's books from the 1960s. On a less positive note, Greig (2006:1) comments: 'After the 100th encounter with the word "wicked" – as in "He looks wickedly savage" or "He looked wickedly guilty" – it is clear that the issue isn't adolescent self-expression but the author's determination to merrily paddle and repaddle the shallows.'

¹⁵⁶ In the *Cape Argus*, Derek Wilson (2005:1) claims that what makes *Spud's* success inevitable is that there are still enough boys' boarding schools around to guarantee a high identification quotient. Indeed, even if a boy went to a boys' school without a boarding house, the reader will find himself identifying with the characters. Women who went to boarding school are also likely to identify strongly with many of the situations described here, and those who didn't may enjoy the voyage of discovery immensely.

Wilson's comments obviously assume a predominantly adult readership.

¹⁵⁷ In the interests of brevity and clarity, Van de Ruit's first novel, *Spud: A Wickedly Funny Novel* (2005) is referred to as *Spud* in this chapter, while the sequel, *Spud – The Madness Continues ... (2007)*, is referred to as *Spud II*.

¹⁵⁸ Plans are well underway for the production of a film based on *Spud*.

contains valuable and relevant material, it could not form part of this study because of its recent publication date.)

The narrative begins in 1990, a turbulent and unpredictable year in which Nelson Mandela is released and one in which – infinitely more importantly for my purposes – Spud tries to adjust to his new life at a posh, upper-class private school peopled by vividly portrayed, larger-than-life characters. Written in the first person, the diary format of the novel allows the reader an (at times to me disturbingly) intimate glimpse into the protagonist’s inward struggles¹⁵⁹ and the frequently confused thought processes allegedly typical of pre-adolescence, the awakening of a moral consciousness and social awareness.¹⁶⁰

Van de Ruit’s novels have a perhaps deliberately sketchy political backdrop, and a large number of explicit and implied social and racial comments permeate the books. The relevance of various discourses of racism in the narrative as a whole is not discounted, but these discourses are not explored in detail in this study because, as Pat Pinsent (2005:14) puts it, before the 1950s, the vast majority of school books contain ‘very little social criticism’ (and it is the books from before the 1950s that form the basis of comparison in this study). This is partly because the selective and elitist nature of the British public school system left very few possibilities for the exploration and subsequent discussion of the issue of racism. In terms of traditional English boys’ school stories, therefore, the exposition of various discourses of racism is practically without precedent, and thus falls beyond the scope and comparative methodology of this study.

¹⁵⁹ As noted in Section 2.6, traditional boys’ school stories tend to almost completely exclude female characters from the narrative, thereby emphasising the cloistered nature of the boys’ public school microcosm. The inclusion of female characters as not only members of staff but also as girlfriends – along with a degree of romantic interest – in the *Spud* novels (as in *Morpurgo*) thus represents a complete divergence from the norm presented in historical books of this genre.

¹⁶⁰ Spud’s personal observations, as well as his association with the liberal African Affairs society, cause him to express his desire to become a ‘freedom fighter’ (Van de Ruit 2005:145). In terms of South African youth literature, a comparison of Van de Ruit’s novels with the politically contentious school books written by Lawrence Bransby, *Down Street* (1989) and *Homeward Bound* (1990), may be particularly useful in the exploration of the development and representation of divergent discourses of racism in South African school fiction.

Although the school is never actually named in either of the novels, Van de Ruit has admitted that his *alma mater*, Michaelhouse, a distinguished and heritage-rich private boys' school founded in 1896, was indeed his 'visual base' for the book (Paterson 2005:1). In an interview, he claimed that 'a lot of things happened to me while I was at Michaelhouse and I've lost track of what's real and what's not. I have embellished it and included the myths that were around when I was there. I've also used other people's stories. But there is truth at its core' (Paterson 2005:1). During another interview conducted in 2006, Van de Ruit claimed that Michaelhouse has 'totally embraced' the book as a fictional representation of itself and is using the novel 'as a text book' (Lee 2006:2).

The relevance of the Spud novels to this study lies in the consideration that 'private schools that were established in South Africa towards the end of the imperial era were modelled on British public schools' (Jenkins 1993:47). In *Children of the Sun*, Jenkins (1993:48) further comments that 'South African schools were staffed by expatriate British schoolmasters and schoolmistresses and took on all the trappings of their British models: "houses", prefects, uniforms, compulsory games, corporal punishment and military cadets for the boys, a classical curriculum and the old school network'. Simultaneous with the implementation of such characteristic elements in elite South African schools was the inculcation of British public school ideals which, according to Morrell (2001:57) in *From Boys to Gentlemen*,¹⁶¹ 'took root [...] primarily via the exportation of its old boys to the colonies'.¹⁶² Thus, many of the discourses and practices discussed in Chapter Three of this study became similarly definitive characteristics of early South African private boys' boarding schools.

In 'Arnolds of the Bushveld', Honey (1975/6:23) argues that the implicit elitism of the British public school system was 'functionally appropriate to the existing social and political system of South Africa'. As Morrell (2001:59) points out, 'the

¹⁶¹ Morrell's book offers valuable insight into the role of elite secondary schools in the production of settler masculinity in the Natal colony from 1880 to 1920.

¹⁶² According to Honey (1977:299), of the top British public schools 'Rugby was pre-eminent as a coloniser'.

elite schools acted more to exclude than to include' and the vast majority of boys (including Africans, Indians and working-class whites) remained 'outside the charmed circle'.¹⁶³ In this way, the schools were crucial to the generation of what one might term 'colonial gentry' and the definition of white hegemonic masculinity through its products.

While the British educational model was regarded by many as the ideal, the difference in environment and community caused an inevitable, and, in many cases, much deplored, difference in the type of English-speaking schoolboy produced in South Africa as opposed to the type of schoolboy produced in the United Kingdom. For example, Montague J. Rendall, a former headmaster and Chairman of the Public Schools Empire Tours Company (an organisation committed to the international promotion of public school notions and ideals) made the following observation concerning South African schoolboys in the 1940s (cited in Jenkins 1993:48):

If I were to design a medal for one of these Schoolboys the superscription might be "Child of the Sun"; the obverse a figure of "independence with a Shield" [...] and the reverse should just be a bright star to symbolise the Sun. [...] The rest of the field would consist of several Rugby footballs and a scanty heap of books. For indeed, truth to tell, this wholesome brown boy [...] who looks straight at you from rather wild eyes half-hidden in a mat of hair, is just a Child of the Sun ... They are by nature Children of the Sun, Sun-worshippers, and culture has little meaning for them. Why should parents and schoolmasters disturb this happy dream?

In *Iron Love*,¹⁶⁴ set predominantly in 1913, Marguerite Poland alludes to the difference between British public school boys and their colonial counterparts in a

¹⁶³ It is in view of this circumstance that the claim by the fictional headmaster, nicknamed 'The Glock', that Spud's school, which is publicly understood to be a fictional representation of Michaelhouse, has 'always supported multiculturalism and liberalism' (Van de Ruit 2005:56; my emphasis) appears rather disingenuous.

¹⁶⁴ Although this novel is set almost entirely in a private boys' school and although many of the issues typical of boys' school stories are approached with compelling insight and sensitivity, *Iron Love* is clearly intended for an adult readership. Moreover, unlike *Spud*, the novel has not enjoyed the remarkable success with younger readers that *Spud* enjoys. Therefore, I do not include the work as a primary text in this study. Nevertheless, Poland's innovative metaphorical applications and unexpected chronological shifts make the novel an absorbing, informative and well-researched depiction of life at a South African boys' boarding school in the early 20th century, and I therefore venture to make passing reference to relevant passages.

less derogatory way. In this book, it is the South African boys' social and environmental conditioning that adequately equips them for active combat and life in service of the British Empire (World War I implicitly looms in the near future). According to the housemaster, 'it is known, wherever we have fought, that vigour and ruggedness are the hallmark of young men from the colonies' (Poland 1999:316).

The desire to emulate the apparently ideal British model remained strong in many instances, and it is certain that Michaelhouse itself was one of the schools modelled along the lines of the grand tradition.¹⁶⁵ Morrell (2001:58) claims that Michaelhouse

had a strong connection with Rugby. Its predecessor, Bishop's College in Pietermaritzburg, was headed by C.C. Prichard, curate at Rugby and Oxford graduate. Its first headmaster was a public school boy and Glasgow and Cambridge University graduate. He was followed by Canon E.B. Hugh Jones (1903-10) of Marlborough and Jesus College, Oxford. The following three headmasters were all public school products [...] and all were Cambridge graduates.

The school was established in 1896, and on Speech Day in 1897, the founder of the institution, James Cameron Todd, described the school's vision in terms clearly imitative of that of its British counterparts: 'Our aim is to make, not accountants, not clerks, not clergymen, but men; men of understanding, thought and culture' (Official Michaelhouse Website s.a.). Similarly, A.W.S. Brown, headmaster of Michaelhouse from 1910 to 1916, is said to have subscribed to British boys' public school values that 'unhesitatingly put character before intellect' (Morrell 2001:58). To this day, Michaelhouse prides itself on its British heritage, a feature which is described as a main characteristic of the architectural layout of the school. One is informed that 'archways and corridors connect each quadrangle, reminiscent of the architectural design of leading British schools' (Official Michaelhouse Website s.a.).

¹⁶⁵ According to Peter Randall (1982:84) in *Little England on the Veld: The English Private School System in South Africa*, '[t]here is no doubt that the original committee thought of Michaelhouse in terms of the public schools in England'.

Chapter Three investigates various aspects of the (British) boys' school experience and its discursive structures through the works of fiction in which it appears. This chapter focuses on those elements of Van de Ruit's first two novels that appear as recurrent motifs reminiscent of (British) traditional boys' school stories.¹⁶⁶ In this way, the inherent discourses implicit in the respective types of literature can be identified and compared.

6.2 SPUD AND HIS DORMITORY MATES – 'ONE HELLUVA COLLECTION OF NUTTERS'

The main boy protagonists of *Spud* (one hesitates to use the term 'heroes') are John Milton (alias Spud) and his dormitory mates, who become notorious as 'The Crazy Eight' after only a very short while at the school. Far removed from the bright-eyed, open-faced, pleasant and somewhat predictable fictional schoolboys of the past, these characters seem to encompass the entire range between the rather ordinary Simon Brown, who is destined to become the best cricketer in the school, and the allegedly mentally unstable Vern Blackadder (otherwise known as 'Rain Man'), who repeatedly pulls out large chunks of his own hair and almost routinely chats to his toiletries before bedtime.

Between these two extremes, one encounters the morally deficient and overly confident – though undeniably outwardly masculine – 'Rambo', who succeeds in developing and maintaining a 'non-platonic relationship' (Van de Ruit 2005:292) with his Drama teacher, nicknamed 'Eve' (who also happens to be the wife of the housemaster, Mr Wilson, alias 'Sparerib'). Spud describes Rambo as a 'big muscular fast-talking boy with dark eyes and jet black hair' who 'includes enough swearing in every sentence to satisfy the group that he means business and is to

¹⁶⁶ The constant, detailed account of Spud's experiences may be interpreted as constitutive of a *Bildungsroman*. As noted in Section 3.2.1, a *Bildungsroman*, in the broadest sense, is 'the story of a single individual's growth and development within the context of a defined social order' (Hader 1996:1). Nevertheless, unlike with *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the question whether either of the novels reflect significant moral development on the part of the protagonist is debatable.

be heartily respected and hero-worshipped'¹⁶⁷ (Van de Ruit 2005:8). 'Boggo', is 'a greasy looking boy with big teeth and a bad case of pimples' (Van de Ruit 2005:11), who is obsessed with pornography and anything similarly obscene, while trigger-happy 'Mad Dog' fails to pass a single examination during the two years he actually spends at the school.¹⁶⁸ Instead, he dedicates almost all of his time to hunting with his catapult, although his impassioned (or perhaps demented) bowling style earns him a certain amount of fame as a cricketer.

Then there is Spud, the physically undersized protagonist, from whose perspective every aspect of the narrative is portrayed. Although his fellows treat him in a generally friendly manner, he never gains overwhelming popularity and, as we read between the lines, it is clear that he always remains a bit of an outsider. His inherent tendency to seek solitude (in order to read or update his diary)¹⁶⁹ may, of course, contribute to this sense of mild alienation, but it is probably aggravated by the fact that Spud is a scholarship student, which implies

¹⁶⁷ A humorous example of Rambo's confidence and sense of mocking self-importance occurs in *Spud II* when Rambo arrives back at school unexpectedly after being expelled (Van de Ruit 2007:307):

There was a long silence. Finally Vern shone his torch on the shadow.

"Rambo!" shouted Vern.

"Oh my God!" gasped Fatty.

"You're both right," replied Rambo and dragged his trunk into the dormitory.

¹⁶⁸ After six days at the school, '[i]t was already common knowledge that Mad Dog had little coordination and no brains whatsoever' (Van de Ruit 2005:23).

¹⁶⁹ As Von Klemperer (2005:2) points out, the diary format inevitably 'recalls Sue Townsend's *Diary of Adrian Mole*, which even gets a mention in the text'. However, Van de Ruit claims that he was 'very conscious of trying not to turn his book into a South African *Adrian Mole*' and asserts that "'Adrian Mole is only a window into himself – Spud is the introduction to the other characters as well as himself, and the world they live in'" (Von Klemperer 2005:2).

Nevertheless, anyone who has read the *Adrian Mole* series would know that Van de Ruit's assertion about *Adrian Mole* is entirely unfounded. In fact, I am of the opinion that Townsend's novels contain far more comment on political, environmental and social issues than either of the *Spud* novels. The following passage is just one example of many relevant instances (Townsend 1984:48):

When the singing stopped [...], Mr Scruton [the headmaster] walked up to his lectern, paused, and then said, "Today is a day that will go down in history." He paused long enough for a rumour to travel along the rows that he was resigning, then he shouted, "Quiet!" and continued, "Today at three minutes to nine a future King of England was born." All the girls, apart from Pandora, (she is a republican) said, "Ooh! Lady Di's 'ad it!" Claire Nielsen shouted: "How much did he weigh?"

Mr Scruton smiled and ignored her.

Pandora shouted, "How much will he cost?" and Mr Scruton suddenly developed good hearing and ordered her out of the assembly hall. [...] Mr Scruton dismissed the school after giving us a talk on what a good job the Royal Family do for British exports.

that, although he has obtained admission as well as the financial support required to attend the school, he is by no means as wealthy as any of his privileged peers.

Van de Ruit uses Spud's relative poverty to great comic effect, especially in respect of the shuddering, staggering family vehicle that makes its embarrassing presence felt at the Under 14A cricket matches (Van de Ruit 2005:22):

A humungous explosion distracted our master player at the precise moment that the bowler released his delivery [...]. I held my head in my hands. [...] I knew that an explosion of such magnitude could only have been created by a pea green 1973 Renault station wagon. My parents had arrived.

That Spud is intensely aware of the difference between the wealth and grandeur that surrounds him in his new school and his less affluent background (which is represented throughout the novels by the disreputable Renault) is evident in Spud's description of his inauspicious arrival on the first day: 'Our station wagon limps up to the school and slides in between a Rolls Royce and a Mercedes Benz. To announce its grand arrival our rust-infested jalopy vomits up a couple of gallons of oil onto the ancient cobblestone paving' (Van de Ruit 2005:4).

The Renault, also referred to as the 'old goat' (Van de Ruit 2005:24) seems out of place in such fine, heritage-rich surroundings – and so, to a certain extent, is Spud. Consequently, he has to deal with a considerable amount of snobbery. He makes the following 'Mental note' in his diary (Van de Ruit 2007:142): 'I must stop jumping out the car and saying Wow when I arrive at rich people's houses. I always get laughed at and then people keep coming up to tell me that their dad's holiday house makes this mansion look like a chicken run.'

Over and above this, Spud's late physical development and his beautiful soprano voice, which causes the choir mistress to become 'embarrassingly excited' (Van de Ruit 2005:29), lay the protagonist open to ruthless mockery and derision. The following extract clearly illustrates the ruthless exclusion of 'other' boys by socially accepted and physically confident peers (Van de Ruit 2005:61): 'Simon,

Rambo and Mad Dog sat together and discussed revenge. When I joined the group, Rambo stopped talking, stared at me and said, “I don’t remember inviting you over here, Spud.” I gulped and blushed and went back to my cubicle, feeling humiliated.’ Later, Spud himself reflects, ‘I stared at myself in the bathroom mirror. Long shaggy brown hair,¹⁷⁰ greeny-brown, olive eyes. Small button nose, roundish face, skinny body. [...] God must be laughing at me’ (Van de Ruit 2005:294).¹⁷¹

To further identify him as a deviation from the traditional boy hero, Spud frequently self-reflectively mourns his lack of courage in the face of opposition, which usually takes the form of peer pressure. For example, when Rambo, the self-appointed king of the dormitory, informs the Crazy Eight that they will all be participating in an illicit night swim,¹⁷² Spud is initially at the head of the dissenters. Nevertheless, ‘order was finally restored when Rambo threatened to murder anyone being cowardly. (Needless to say we all cowardly backed down)’ (Van de Ruit 2005:30).

Spud’s closest friend turns out to be the sickly and accident-prone Gecko, whose ‘paleness creates a strange luminous light’. Despite his weak constitution and the remarkable physical likeness, this character is essentially the opposite of cowardly Unwin, the ‘gutless gecko’ character described in the Marguerite Poland’s (1999:122) *Iron Love*. Instead, Gecko’s words and deeds cause Spud to reconsider his own morally reprehensible behaviour (Van de Ruit 2005:240):

¹⁷⁰ Spud is instructed to allow his hair to grow by the director of the school musical, *Oliver*, in which Spud plays the lead role (Van de Ruit 2005:157):

I thanked Viking for giving me the chance [to play the title role] but he cut me off with, “Now listen, Milton, we need to do something with your look. How would you feel about curly blonde hair?” I stammered something and he said, “Good. Now whatever you do, do not cut your hair! I have obtained permission for you and the Fagin’s gang to grow your hair long. So if you cut your hair, you may as well go the whole hog and cut your head off as well!”

¹⁷¹ With reference to the physically disadvantaged Unwin in *Iron Love*, Poland (1999:312) claims that ‘[b]oys are not born equal, God. You do not love them all the same. That is very clear. The Meek do not inherit the earth’.

¹⁷² The forbidden midnight swim may be seen as a South African variant of the forbidden midnight feast typical of many school stories.

I felt terrible shame and guilt. I remembered all the times I'd jeered and snickered and mocked Gecko in front of the others, all because it made me feel stronger and part of the pack. But Gecko had real courage. To tell somebody that they're special takes courage. I reckon this vomiting, pale-faced Gecko has more guts than the rest of the Crazy Eight put together.

In a sense, the depiction of Gecko's character suggests a discourse of courage which is essentially different from the traditional idea of physical prowess and fearlessness as an external vindication of innate moral fibre and bravery. In fact, Gecko is so different from the stereotyped plucky schoolboy (who never pales at the prospect of a hard tackle) that during his first rugby trial he is labelled a 'blithering disgrace' by the coach because 'in the first movement he sprinted away from the ball at full speed' (Van de Ruit 2005:172). In his terror at finally being given the ball, Gecko crowns his limited rugby achievements by running 'straight off the field and into the main pavilion where he locked himself in the ladies' toilet. Vern was sent in to retrieve the ball and, after some gentle persuasion, managed to negotiate its release so that the trials could continue' (Van de Ruit 2005:172). Van de Ruit seems to insinuate that one does not need to be 'a first team rugby god' (Van de Ruit 2005:283) to have moral backbone, a view rather unlike Hughes's ([1857] 1971:90) clear association of the one with the other in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* when Hughes expresses his belief that 'as endless as are boys' characters, so are their ways of facing or not facing a scrummage at football'.

Then there is Fatty, an obese and gluttonous boy, who during his first rugby trial manages to play for about three minutes before 'falling over and wheezing like a beached whale' (Van de Ruit 2005:172). In *Spud II*, The Guv refers to Fatty as 'our man Falstaff' (Van de Ruit 2007:186). Of course, the most obvious similarity between the obese schoolboy and the Shakespearian character lies in their shared tendency to gluttony and over-indulgence. In this respect the other 'schoolboy Falstaff', the inimitable Billy Bunter¹⁷³ also comes to mind.

¹⁷³ In some ways Billy Bunter (discussed in Section 3.4) is perhaps more deserving of the comparison with Shakespeare's character because, coupled with his greed, Bunter displays an

In other respects, however, Fatty is quite different from the affable knight. Whereas Falstaff is frequently portrayed as slightly intoxicated, constantly calling for more 'sack', and scornful of 'those who abstain from drink' (Fallon 2002:241), Fatty almost consistently refuses alcohol and certainly never becomes drunk. He is also generally not given to blatant exaggerations or falsehood, except on the one occasion when he is obliged to publicly relate (on Rambo's orders) the details of an imagined religious conversion in the chapel in order to save the Crazy Eight from discovery and punishment for their midnight swim.

Moreover, his personality is not at all characterised by the 'raffish joviality' (Smith 2007:12) synonymous with Shakespeare's Falstaff, but rather by a sarcastic, rather sick sense of humour (see Van de Ruit 2005:83-84). Nevertheless, there seems to be a slight correlation between the ways in which both characters view their respective positions in society. Just as Falstaff frequently behaves in a manner regarded as quite inappropriate for a knight, Fatty is, likewise, completely unperturbed by social expectations of the decorum to be exercised by a student of an elite private boys' school. The following extract is typical of Fatty's behaviour throughout the novels (Van de Ruit 2007:155): 'Fatty let rip with a loud and foul smelling burp and everyone cheered and then charged for the door. And to think other schools call us snobs?'

Despite the bizarre and seemingly incompatible characteristics of the respective individuals, Spud and his dormitory mates soon acquire joint notoriety as the 'Crazy Eight',¹⁷⁴ a peer group of such distinct qualities that it actually seems to function as an autonomous character in the narrative. Although the boys generally cooperate with each other under the pseudo-heroic motto 'All for one', circumstances occasionally reveal the tension that is bound to arise among so varied a collection of personalities. Scenes of fights among ostensibly sworn

apparent inability to tell the truth and a tendency to gross exaggeration that parallel the infamous vices of Falstaff.

¹⁷⁴ Spud fondly describes the Crazy Eight as 'one helluva collection of nutters' (Van de Ruit 2005:387).

friends break out in displays of uncontrolled violence quite unheard of in traditional boys' school stories (Van de Ruit 2005:90):

For the first time our dormitory was the scene of some real ugliness. What followed was shocking. Rambo punched Fatty in the face. Fatty fell back against the locker. Mad Dog charged in and attacked Rambo, who bit a chunk of flesh out of Mad Dog's shoulder. [...] There was blood everywhere and Fatty was sobbing like a little boy. I felt like helping him. I wanted to put something over his nose to stop the blood. He lay on the floor like a great dying animal surrounded by curious onlookers. I felt sick. [...] An hour ago it was All for one; now it was Dog eat dog! (Or man eats Mad Dog.)

Nevertheless, despite the occasional scraps amongst its members, the Crazy Eight essentially becomes an emotional haven for each of the boys, a society in which they generally experience a sense of acceptance, despite an underlying tendency to cruelty. After being cooped up in the sanatorium for a considerable length of time, during which he frequently wonders what the Crazy Eight are up to, Spud recalls his eventual return to the dormitory (Van de Ruit 2005:244):

Back on my feet I realised that it was in fact the Crazy Eight [...] who were carrying Simon out towards the fish pond. Our cricket captain landed with a splash and disappeared, before launching himself back out of the pond with gallons of water cascading out of his school uniform. He trudged back towards the house. "Happy Birthday," I said as he passed me.

"Stuff off!" came the reply.

Damn, it's good to be back!

Later in the novel, Spud comments, 'I've kind of missed the old dog eats dog world of the dorm. And hell, there's nothing like the Crazy Eight for sheer entertainment value' (Van de Ruit 2005:271). It would appear therefore that, as Spud notes in his diary, 'after a while the madness becomes normal' (Van de Ruit 2005:84). In terms of discourse theory, one might interpret this statement as suggestive of the extent to which (in Spud's school environment, at least) abnormal, alternative discourses (viewed as 'madness' from a traditional perspective) have eclipsed what Spud perceives as normal, dominant discourses of sanity – thus illustrating the theory that even the most unconventional emergent discourses can, during the passage of time and through prolific perpetuation, attain dominant status within specific social contexts.

6.3 REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SCHOOL AND SCHOOL ETHOS

Van de Ruit questions the frequently expressed discourse of the school as an emotional and physical sanctuary for boys. He challenges this perception by pointing out that for physically, mentally and especially emotionally vulnerable boys, the school presents itself as a place of torture – a society in which the weak suffer persecution. As Gecko puts it, ‘I tell you, Spud, this place is like an insane asylum! There are maniacs in this place – even our headmaster’s a maniac! Don’t you feel it too? It’s like there’s always someone out to get you, or laugh at you or make you feel like an idiot or coward or something ...’ (Van de Ruit 2005:239). Spud’s subsequent thoughts sum up the actual state of affairs: ‘Gecko is right – if you are on the wrong side of the fence, this place is hell’ (Van de Ruit 2005:240).

It would seem, moreover, that in this respect, Gecko’s experience is synonymous with that of countless others who, over the years, have failed to conform to the ideals associated with the discourses which inform the school ethos. Concerning the elite private boarding schools of Natal between 1880 and 1920 (including, of course, Michaelhouse), Morrell (2001:65) observes that

[f]or those who were perceived as weak and different, a grim fate was in store. Little is known about the secret lives of anguish in the boarding schools. There is nevertheless sufficient evidence to show that intolerance of difference (sexual, social, morphological) existed. If one’s voice was too high,¹⁷⁵ one’s legs too thin, ability at games absent, one became the object of ridicule.

This perspective, though admittedly realistic, differs distinctly from the ideals expressed by the management of a school such as Michaelhouse regarding the schooling environment the management wishes to create through the professed values of the institution. According to the Official Michaelhouse Website (s.a.), the staff members and students strive to ‘live [their] lives according to the Christian values of integrity, humility, compassion and courage in service to

¹⁷⁵ Spud recalls the humiliation occasioned by the general response to his soprano voice during roll-call: “Sharks!” I squeaked. Everyone laughed.

[their] community and country'. Despite the gap of almost one hundred and fifty years, these ideals seem almost identical to Squire Brown's desire that Tom would turn out 'a brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishman, and a gentleman, and a Christian' (Hughes [1857] 1971:66). This would seem to indicate that, for the school authorities at least, the discourses implicit in such ideals are still viewed as valuable and their perpetuation, desirable. Nevertheless, even a superficial reading of *Spud* or *Spud II* leaves the reader with a strong conviction that such values, while expressing uplifting ideals, are not represented by Van de Ruit as being put into practice. In the fictional account, one sees duplicity instead of integrity, arrogance instead of humility, cowardice instead of courage and scornful derision of those in need of compassion.

For example, when Mad Dog unjustly mocks the emotionally fragile Vern in front of the entire dormitory, Spud feels ashamed that he is unable to find the courage to stand up for his cubicle mate (Van de Ruit 2005:18). In a sense, one may argue that Spud's feelings of guilt do him credit, but what are they worth when they are not translated into actions? Furthermore, his passive approach does not change much during the course of the novel; later on he describes a scene which occurs in the dormitory shortly after Vern has been removed from the school and placed in a psychiatric institution for assessment. As before, Spud mentions his inner misgivings, but admits to enjoying a joke at his deranged cubicle mate's expense: 'Rambo then joined in and the pair did a wicked impersonation of Rain Man [Vern] and a psychologist in the nuthouse. Felt guilty to be laughing my head off' (Van de Ruit 2005:57).

However, when Spud is alone with Vern, and therefore not under the immediate influence of Rambo and the other members of the Crazy Eight, he does make valiant (though admittedly feeble) attempts at compassionate behaviour – which attempts are rewarded with a flash of Vern's 'demented smile' (Van de Ruit 2005:81) and the resultant stigma of association with an ostracised misfit. Nevertheless, there is a humorous suggestion that Spud's kindness may be the born out of self-interest. Spud confides: '05:30 Woke up to find Vern changing his

sheets again – I pretended to be sleeping. I’ve decided to be nice to Vern. (My Uncle Aubrey once told me to always stay on the right side of demented people)’ (Van de Ruit 2005:31).

The impetus to conduct one’s affairs with honesty and integrity seems barely to reach beyond the school prospectus, with frequent evidence of the opposite pervading the novel. In striking contrast to the so-called ‘honour bright’ discourse of integrity, Spud is confronted with completely divergent ideas. Not only do his school fellows adhere to dicta such as ‘if you’re gonna lie – lie big’ (Van de Ruit 2005:27), but several circumstances and their respective outcomes¹⁷⁶ lead Spud to conclude that ‘in this place honesty gets you nowhere’ (Van de Ruit 2005:308).

The subversion reaches greater intensity when Spud’s English teacher, Mr Edly (alias The Guv) offers him some dubious counsel (Van de Ruit 2005:260):

“Milton, if I can offer you one piece of advice in your dealings with the unfairest sex – honesty, honesty, honesty, honesty! Avoid it at all costs! Lie through your teeth at every turn and you’ll get away with it. When you finally get caught out, pretend you’re mad and develop a drinking problem.”

Now this was the kind of advice I’d been waiting for! I downed my last few sips of wine and sank back into the couch feeling relieved – damn, life’s good when you aren’t dragging a huge burden of guilt around on your back!

Perhaps the most subversive aspect of this extract is the fact that Van de Ruit actually allows his protagonist to follow The Guv’s advice in certain areas of his life, despite the authorial insinuation that it can lead only to disaster.¹⁷⁷ The advice Spud receives from the school psychologist, ‘Dr Zoo’, is similarly seditious: ‘[N]obody is going to hate a fourteen-year-old for two-timing his girlfriend. At least not for long. You’re too young to take your relationships so seriously – go out there, burn or be burned. If you don’t take a bite into Eve’s apple now, you may never get the chance again’ (Van de Ruit 2005:296).

¹⁷⁶ When Emberton and Devries place a banana in the exhaust pipe of the headmaster’s car and are subsequently suspended, pending expulsion, they connive with Mad Dog to reverse their punishment. Their dishonesty seems to pay off when they are allowed to return to the school.

¹⁷⁷ This is implicit in Van de Ruit’s specific mention of The Guv’s failed marriages.

The essentially distorted discourses which permeate the novels are evidence that, in the fictional form recreated by Van de Ruit, the school experience provides little encouragement for the boys to aspire to the high ideals summarised by the present Rector of Michaelhouse, Guy N. Pearson, in a speech delivered in 2006 (Official Michaelhouse Website s.a.): ‘At Michaelhouse we strive to produce young men with a man’s determination to do right, a man’s courage to do good, a man’s sympathy for other people’s troubles, a man’s patience and strength with his own and a man’s intolerance for injustice to others’.

This outline of the principles the school wishes to instil in the boys highlights yet another discourse that Van de Ruit’s novels appear consciously to contest. While the ideal, and indeed, previously largely unchallenged discourse concerning general obedience encourages the boys to ‘do right’, Spud struggles to do this because he is surrounded by advocates of an alternative discourse of disobedience which propagates the blatant defiance of rules for no rational reason except to display insubordination in order to gain acceptance in the peer group.¹⁷⁸

For example, when Spud decides, along with two other members of the Crazy Eight, to drink wine on the school bus, he notes that they were ‘warmly congratulated for our complete disregard for the school rules’ (Van de Ruit 2005:95). Later in the novel, when Vern and Gecko attempt to break into the school laboratory to steal lab rats for Roger the cat and are caught red-handed, Spud recalls that ‘Rambo congratulated them for their courage and their

¹⁷⁸ Bristow (1991:69) notes that

Tom Brown for one did not always do as he was told. [...] Were he to be entirely dutiful, he would not be independent. Although the school was designed to keep the boy’s every move under surveillance, it also instilled in him the importance of being his own man. If the boy could escape the eye of his prefects and masters unnoticed, he had triumphed. And if not, he would face a condign punishment for being so daring. At its most exuberant, imperial boyhood took the risk of asserting its strength out of bounds.

This extract indicates that the discourse of disobedience discussed in Section 6.3 is not unprecedented. However, the comparatively innocent misdemeanours committed by Tom Brown and his fictional successors never include drinking, smoking, stealing or similar acts of dishonesty, and would thus be more correctly identified as forming part of a discourse of mischief.

disrespect for the school rules. They both grinned like idiots and looked incredibly proud of their achievement' (Van de Ruit 2005:130).

Perhaps the best example of the portrayal of this discourse of disobedience occurs when Spud is cajoled into participating in a raid on the school kitchen, an endeavour which has no motive except a desire to break the school rules (Van de Ruit 2005:200):

I'm not afraid to admit that I was terrified. Perched on Fatty's shoulders with my head poked through the kitchen window, I was once again reminded why this school is a living hell. And as far as I was concerned, this was it. How do you explain to your parents that you were expelled for stealing food from the school kitchen when you're not even hungry?

Although the operation goes off smoothly, and most of the food is consumed by the Crazy Eight before the next morning, Spud (by now nauseated as a result of over-eating) lies in bed pondering the unanswerable question of why he and his peers have risked their futures 'for cheese, bread and stewing beef' (Van de Ruit 2005:201).

Although they frequently escape punishment for their misdemeanours, the intrepid Crazy Eight nevertheless receive their come-uppance in *Spud II* when they are caught smoking and drinking alcohol in the Mad House. Their punishments are severe, with five of them being not only beaten, but also suspended from school. Rambo and Mad Dog are expelled. Nonetheless, despite the disgrace of their position, the boys still seem to take some pride in their crazy and frequently illegal exploits. As usual, it is Rambo who speaks from the perspective of a particularly subversive discourse of disobedience (Van de Ruit 2007:281):

Rambo stood on his footlocker and said, 'In case this is the end for the Crazy Eight I just want to say that it's been a hell of two years with you guys.' He then started to choke up which made us all choke up. 'Anyway, it's been cool. And, hey, what can I say? The Crazy Eight went out with a bang, not a whimper!' We all shook hands and paws and returned to our beds in silence.

The sense of pride is obvious and further emphasised by the fact that both Rambo and Mad Dog reiterate these sentiments as they say goodbye to Spud. Rambo, who initially mocks Spud for his diary routine says, ‘You know what? Now I’m glad you wrote it all down in your diary – because then one day maybe people will know what we did’ (Van de Ruit 2007:286). Similarly, Mad Dog seizes Spud by the shoulders and gives him a final instruction: ‘And you’d better make sure you write how amazing the Mad House was – I don’t want people thinking it was just a kiddies’ tree house or something’ (Van de Ruit 2007:286).

With regard to the generally subversive tenor of the novels the question arises as to whether Van de Ruit’s frank and at times disconcerting depictions of schoolboy experience (though neither explicitly autobiographical nor entirely fictional) could be injurious to Michaelhouse’s reputation. In order to mitigate this possibility, Guy Pearson (Michaelhouse Rector) stressed the fictional aspect of the novels in an interview with Margaret von Klemperer (2007:1) in response to her allusion to the school’s ‘new notoriety’. He said, “The important thing to remember is that this is fiction. [...] And a lot of the stories in the book didn’t happen here. For us, that’s critical. People must understand that it is not Michaelhouse.” Nevertheless, despite the headmaster’s concerns, he admits that *Spud* ‘has been good for the school’ and that the interest [the book] has generated in the school over the past couple of years has been extraordinary; it seems that, even though it depicts a school where boys and staff alike are borderline lunatics, Spud [sic] has been a good recruiting tool’ (Von Klemperer 2007:1).

Pearson’s comments are significant in that they highlight a possible shift in the expectations and criteria parents and boys require of the school experience. Whereas *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* functioned as a successful kind of prospectus for Rugby by carefully pointing out the moral and spiritual advantages to be gained by such an education, Van de Ruit’s depiction of Michaelhouse (he admits that when he is writing, he ‘envisages his characters in the setting of the school’ (Von Klemperer 2007:1)) is far from morally uplifting. That a work of this nature should increase positive interest in the school suggests that society in

general no longer places unqualified emphasis on the values promoted and celebrated in exclusive boys' schools and boys' school stories of the past. Nevertheless, the public proclamation and publication of such ideals lends noble sophistication and a sense of heritage to the present school prospectus, regardless of the extent to which these (arguably residual) values actually affect the boys and their actions.

6.4 CANING – 'WE TAKE OUR PUNISHMENT LIKE MEN'¹⁷⁹

In the elite South African boarding schools at the beginning of the twentieth century, '[h]arsh elements were central to the construction of "muscular Christianity" and were consciously inserted into the system. Teachers believed that it was necessary for boys to be beaten, to undergo hardship, in short, to be toughened' (Morrell 2001:59). Morrell's remarks concerning the dominant corporal punishment discourses in South African boys' schools may just as well have referred to historical British public school discourses. As Honey (1987:155) observes, corporal punishment was viewed as a means whereby a boy could be trained 'to endure humiliation and physical pain, to come to terms with public opinion and to know [his] place, rising to be a house prefect, school prefect or games captain, and arriving at the end with that quality of self-confidence and poise which came to be the hallmark of the public school man'. Corporal punishment was therefore seen as essential to the construction of a particular kind of masculinity.

Thus, beatings were approved and endured not only because the system required them, but also 'because they proved masculinity' (Morrell 2001:61). Consequently, the fact that corporal punishment features and is sanctioned by most of the characters in Van de Ruit's novels suggests that, in Spud's school at least, this model of tough, emotionally disciplined masculinity¹⁸⁰ is still seen to be

¹⁷⁹ Van de Ruit (2005:89).

¹⁸⁰ Spud's perceptions of desirable manliness are illustrated during his first date: 'The movie was a real tearjerker so I decided to look *manly* and *rugged* and *unaffected* throughout' (Van de Ruit 2005:154; my emphases).

worthy of emulation. Hence, the ability to handle a beating *with dignity* is directly linked to identification with the masculine ideal.

Because the Crazy Eight is comprised of such a wide variety of characters, Van de Ruit is able to portray diverse responses to corporal punishment in the same episode. This strategy highlights the humour implicit in the non-traditional behaviour of some of the boys, as well as the alternative discourses they represent.

Spud recalls his initial shock when he witnesses his first beating carried out with a sawn-off hockey stick in an Afrikaans class. This episode is somewhat subversive because of the teacher's unexpected response to what Spud sees as Fatty's bravery during his ordeal. Instead of appreciating Fatty's ability to take his thrashing 'without so much as flinching' (Van de Ruit 2005:30) – the ideal response that is commended in traditional boys' school stories and the associated dominant discourse of corporal punishment – his response only serves to anger the teacher more, a circumstance which not only earns Fatty additional detention, but also causes the whole class to be punished by having to complete extra homework.

The discursive basis for the teacher's unanticipated reaction lies, perhaps, in a discourse of corporal punishment that views the caning process as an apparently legitimate way for the teacher to assuage his own anger by inflicting physical pain on the perpetrator. Fatty's brave response, therefore, while perhaps admirable in itself, does nothing to appease the teacher's frustration, and thus further punishment is deemed necessary.

While Fatty is able to handle a thrashing with a considerable amount of 'stiff upper lip', the rest of the Crazy Eight are often not able to emulate his example. When the boys are caught 'night swimming', they are informed that their punishment will be four lashes each from their housemaster, Sparerib, who, by

all accounts ‘beats like a sadist’¹⁸¹ (Van de Ruit 2005:31). Rambo, who prides himself on his masculinity, manages to keep up his tough reputation by ‘walking casually’ away from the housemaster’s office, although even he is not able to ‘hide the pain in his face’ (Van de Ruit 2005:98). Similarly true to form, Mad Dog, saunters out of the room smiling. This, nevertheless, is where the heroism ends and Van de Ruit launches into a series of reactions to caning which strike the reader with a sense of hilarity on account of their obvious deviations from the fictional norm (Van de Ruit 2005:98):

Boggo sped out, rubbing his [backside]. Much to the delight of the growing crowd, he pulled down his pants and cooled his bum on the red brick cloister wall. By this stage I was all set to run away, or wet myself. Then Gecko flew out of the office, screaming, and vomited in the gutter.

I staggered into the office and could hear the noise of the crowd outside. ‘Hands on the chair, Milton, and grit your teeth,’ said Sparerib as if he was offering me a cup of tea and a chocolate biscuit. [...]

Then I was running. My backside was on fire. [...] I kept running and running and running and then I was laughing and shouting.

Despite the consideration that they were being punished for wilful disregard of the school rules, the other schoolboys (junior and senior), do not treat the Crazy Eight with any kind of censure or reproach. Instead, Spud recalls that ‘the entire house was looking at us like we were celebrities’ (Van de Ruit 2005:99), and ‘people I didn’t know were thumping me on the back and laughing’ (Van de Ruit 2005:98).

Moreover, Spud’s description of the subsequent ‘bottie inspection’ illustrates the interest occasioned by the beating (Van de Ruit 2005:99):

[Julian] and Bert took their time going from one bum to another making observations now and again prodding someone’s butt cheek with the back end of Bert’s toothbrush. Gecko’s entire backside is blue and Julian awarded him first

¹⁸¹ C.S. Lewis ([1955] 1991:27) presents a far more disturbing image of apparent sadism in his autobiography:

Everyone talks about sadism nowadays [...] I have seen Oldie make that child bend down at the end of the schoolroom and then take a run of the room’s length at each stroke; but P. was the trained sufferer of countless thrashings and no sound escaped him until, towards the end of the torture, there came a noise quite unlike a human utterance. That peculiar croaking or rattling cry, that, and the grey faces of all the other boys, and their deathlike stillness, are among the memories I could willingly dispense with.

prize. There was a flash of light and before we knew it, Julian had taken a photograph of our naked backsides. (No doubt this photograph will surface in some seedy magazine when I'm rich and famous.)

Such ritual inspections are, by all accounts, not unusual or isolated recent practices in boys' boarding schools. In fact, Stiebel (cited in Morrell 2001:61) recalls the aftermath of beatings at Michaelhouse in the early twentieth century thus:

After the beating it was the privilege of one's dormitory mates to inspect the damage. I was disappointed that there was not more enthusiasm. "What, no blood?" said Crowe minor. "Don't call that much," said Heathfield. "Alfie [the teacher] took pity on you, you weed," jeered Elison, who was measuring my bruises with a ruler. Nevertheless, for the remainder of that day I was a little hero and for ten days after, the discolourations [sic] were there for all to inspect in the bath-house.

Although Stiebel's autobiographical account is less self-conscious and noticeably less homophobic than Spud's, it illustrates the 'macho bravado' (Morrell 2001:61) that often accompanies corporal punishment in boys' schools.

The beating episode described by Spud, however, holds further benefits for the intrepid dormitory mates. Amongst the members of the Crazy Eight, the shared pain of the ordeal also serves to strengthen the bonds of loyalty and comradeship (Van de Ruit 2005:98): 'Rambo shook my hand and Mad Dog threw his arm around my shoulder. There was Simon and Boggo and Vern and Gecko, laughing, talking rubbish. Tonight we were once again brothers in arms'.

6.5 TEAM SPIRIT AND SPORT: 'WE ARE NO LONGER BOYS. TOMORROW WE FIGHT LIKE MEN'¹⁸²

While the Crazy Eight seem to experience euphoria and a collective sense of belonging to their peer group through insubordination and its punishment, the cultivation of team spirit amongst the rest of the school seems to be much more difficult to achieve. It is not impossible, however, and Spud, who is deeply

¹⁸² Van de Ruit (2005:179).

affected by the idealism of the moment, relates his first experience of this sense of brotherhood while singing the school song (Van de Ruit 2005:86):

Four hundred voices nearly raised the roof off the ancient building. I had goosebumps all over as every boy let rip with as much *passion and heart* as he had. It was impossible not to feel like a *huge band of brothers* about to go off and thrash the living daylights out of the enemy. This feeling of *unity and passion* lasted exactly *six minutes*. (my emphases)

In this episode, Van de Ruit is clearly parodying the discourse of school spirit in which boys consistently exhibit a sense of solidarity in their dealings with one another, thereby drawing attention to the underlying antagonism and antipathy which festers beneath the deceptively tranquil surface.

Another, perhaps more telling, depiction of the ambivalent nature of school spirit occurs shortly after the rugby war cry practice, which ‘sounded like a fighter jet scorching through the valley’ (Van de Ruit 2005:179): ‘The rest of the school, pumped with spirit and half frozen by the miserable weather, chased each other around. Mad Dog crash-tackled Vern and Gecko [...]. Rambo then flattened Mad Dog. [...] Boys were running and shouting and laughing and *trying to hurt each other*. School spirit has never been better’ (my emphasis). The jarring anomaly of Spud’s passing reference to the boys’ actual intentions to inflict bodily harm thus highlights the disguised tension that exists amongst the students.

Another familiar discourse which emerges from this extract is the implied relationship between sport and war. As Bristow (1991:57) comments with reference to historical boys’ school stories, ‘the school playing field is like a battleground where heroic deeds are done’. Speaking from this perspective, Spud observes shortly after a particularly lucky moment in a cricket match, ‘I hate to admit it, dear diary, but I am a hero’ (Van de Ruit 2005:24). Instead of completely rejecting this discourse, Van de Ruit seems rather to subvert it by building on it, allowing not only the students, but more particularly the teachers, to subscribe to it with ludicrous sincerity. For example, The Guv subjects Spud and his cricket team-mates to an ‘impassioned team talk’ during which he ‘even

quoted an entire Shakespearian speech, which he reckons was said by King Henry the Fifth before the battle of Asiancaw [sic]. He also threatened to castrate us if we lost' (Van de Ruit 2005:21).

While the Guv's pseudo-dramatic approach to some extent strengthens the dominant discourse in its fervent incitement to bravery, it is undermined by his concluding (empty) threat and the fact that he is applying the discursive structure usually associated with contact sports such as rugby to the considerably less combative game of cricket. In *Spud II*, The Guv's pep talk takes on an unprecedented but effective form (Van de Ruit 2007:23):

The Guv made us listen to a tape of Beethoven at full volume in the change room before our match against Drake College. Our coach strode around conducting the recorded orchestra with my cricket bat. After the piece finished, he told us to "Render all helpless in the eternal fight for blinding glory." We all looked as aggressive as possible and Mad Dog punched a dent in the toilet door.

Once again, Van de Ruit's conscious decision to end the stirring episode with a comical anti-climax seems to suggest an alternative perspective that considers the sport-war discourse pretentious and over-rated. Even Spud's description of the 'first team rugby gods', consisting of 'six feet and four inches of pure muscle' (Van de Ruit 2005:178), smacks of the farcical: '[The captain's] voice was deep and rich and with his steely-eyed looks he instantly hiked up the atmosphere to breaking point. [...] "We are no longer boys. Tomorrow we fight like men."' ¹⁸³ In this excerpt, Van de Ruit is clearly satirising the age-old veneration of the athletically gifted schoolboy, described at length in Chapter Three of this study. As C. Day-Lewis comments of Sherbourne public school in his day, 'It was the blue-and-gold ties of the First XV or the First XI which made them demi-gods' (cited in Quigly 1982:51).

The war cry practice in *Spud II*, moreover, not only sees the boys reiterating these hostile sentiments, but also bears witness to an increase in the incitement

¹⁸³ 'For many commentators rugby is a violent game: it pits men in symbolic combat against one another, it gives vent to deep psychic male violence' (Morrell 2001:79).

to bloodthirstiness and brutality, the effects of which highlight their facetiousness (Van de Ruit 2007:133):

The first war cry practice of the year was pretty intense. Anderson got so fired up in his captaincy speech that he told us to not only *destroy* the Blacksmith College rugby teams but to “*mangle their broken bodies and spit on their corpses*” as well. This seemed to go down well with the school because there was screeching and sounds of horror from the backbenchers (matrics who don’t play rugby). Pike showed his school spirit by hurling two of the Darryls off the top of the stands and then *bleating like a sheep*. (my emphases)

Furthermore, Van de Ruit seems to mock the do-or-die attitude implicit in this kind of speech by describing Vern Blackadder’s impassioned (and amusing) way of putting it into action (Van de Ruit 2007:141):

Vern scored two tries and surprised everyone by having a brilliant game. He’s developed his own technique of catching the ball and then screaming like a psychopath before charging straight at the opposition wing. Both times the opposition wing ran away in terror and Vern scored under the poles.

Nevertheless, the author reserves his most revolutionary comments on sporting moments for Spud’s inauspicious rugby career. In order to appreciate the context, it is useful to consider the historical importance of the sport in Natal’s elite boys’ schools. Surviving records indicate that rugby was played and promoted by such institutions as early as 1870, largely as a result of the implementation of British public school practices by expatriate schoolmasters. According to Morrell (2001:96), by the early 1900s, Natal was ‘fanatical in its enthusiasm for rugby’. Sport, and rugby in particular, was seen as essential for the development of rugged, physically capable men who conformed to the ‘colonial template for masculinity’ (Morrell 2001:79). Consequently, rugby became a symbol of hegemonic, upper-class masculinity that was associated with the educated and empowered gentry.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Charlie Fraser, one of the main protagonists in Poland’s *Iron Love*, whose character ‘is based closely on the truth’ (Poland 1999:iv) embodies the athletic characteristics of the ideal colonial schoolboy. An excerpt from the school [St Andrew’s College] magazine claims that ‘Fraser is a splendid full-back, solid as the proverbial stone wall, a courageous tackler and an accurate kicker with both feet. Can always be relied upon to be steady and cool’ (Poland 1999:1).

Moreover, failure to endorse rugby as ‘*the sport was taken as treacherous, opening one up to class, race and gender (homophobic)*¹⁸⁵ insults’ (Morrell 2001:97; Morrell’s emphasis). When viewed from this perspective, the descriptions of Spud’s hopeless Under 14D rugby team and the anti-violence approach adopted by Mr Lilly, their eccentric coach, seem all the more bizarre. In a display of blatant disregard for rugby traditions, the satirically named coach arrives at the first practice ‘dressed in long pants, white socks and tennis shoes’, thus providing a striking (albeit refreshing) change ‘from all the other coaches on various fields sprinting around in rugby boots, barking orders and blowing their whistles’ (Van de Ruit 2005:175). Apparently, ‘Mr Lilly is a pacifist who’s incredibly concerned about us hurting ourselves. He doesn’t use a whistle, but claps his hands when play must be stopped. (He reckons whistles are a symbol of oppression.) His strategy is to have fun and be gentle with one another’ (Van de Ruit 2005:175).

In fact, it would seem that according to Mr Lilly’s implied, and thoroughly unconventional perception of rugby, a successful match is not necessarily one in which the players exhibit a do-or-die determination to win, but rather one during which no injuries are sustained. Nonetheless, after the team’s umpteenth defeat, this time by a team from an Afrikaans school (who allegedly ‘took the game way too seriously’), even the eternally optimistic Mr Lilly struggles to find anything positive ‘amongst the wreckage’ (Van de Ruit 2005:210). ‘Eventually he said that we showed remarkable consistency (consistently bad?) and spirit far beyond our young years’ (Van de Ruit 2005:210). Thus, Van de Ruit’s extreme subversion of the norm allows for a significant amount of situational humour.

Furthermore, as Morrell (2001:97) observes, rugby is a game which can ‘threaten one’s masculinity, make one feel inadequate, exclude and negate one’. Spud, a protagonist whose manliness is questioned on many levels throughout the

¹⁸⁵ Spud candidly relates that Mr Lilly ‘let us go after an hour of prancing around the field like a bunch of girls’ (Van de Ruit 2005:175).

narrative, also experiences the effects of personal humiliation on the rugby field (Van de Ruit 2005:192):

I placed the ball on a mound of sand and steadied myself for the conversion attempt. All was still. Before me stood the posts. This was my moment. I couldn't miss. I took my run up, my technique very much based on years of watching Naas Botha on the telly. I approached the ball and kicked it solidly. Unfortunately, it came out low and struck the crossbar and then rebounded savagely at me, striking me straight in the face. The medics and Mr Lilly sprinted onto the field with the first aid kit and wiped the blood from my nose. Once I was repaired, I ran back to my team who were doubled over with laughter. [...] My nickname seems to have changed from Spud to Boomerang.

Thanks to his sense of humour, Spud is able to laugh at his inadequacies and escape self-condemnation by focusing his energies on the development of his natural flair for drama. Nevertheless, the fact that he can, as the protagonist of a boys' school story, make light of his failure at rugby constitutes, in itself, evidence of a shift in discourses that indicates the possibility of social success despite the lack of rugged athletic prowess.

6.6 FAGGING – 'MY FIRST DAY OF SLAVING'¹⁸⁶

It would seem that the area in which Van de Ruit's novels align themselves most complacently with a traditionally accepted discourse is that of fagging. Shortly after their arrival at the school, Spud and his fellows are informed that their week of grace is over and that they are now not only in danger of initiation by older boys, but they are forthwith also required to 'slave' for a prefect. Van de Ruit's treatment of this familiar motif is largely stereotypical, especially in terms of the services required of the fags.

Although Spud's chores begin quite early in the morning, at 06:20, and end extremely late at night, at 20:45,¹⁸⁷ they consist of precisely the same tasks that would have been required of Tom Brown at Rugby: cleaning the prefect's study

¹⁸⁶ Van de Ruit (2005:28).

¹⁸⁷ Spud's fagging duties do, however, extend beyond the norm during Earthworm's final examinations when Spud is woken up in the middle of the night and required to 'remake [Earthworm's] bed and talk to him until he dropped off to sleep' (Van de Ruit 2005:357).

and polishing his shoes, as well as the punctual preparation of tea and toast. In keeping with the norm, Spud's assigned prefect, nicknamed Earthworm, also exercises his right to chastise Spud for alleged slackness by giving him 'fingertongs' with the blackboard duster, during which procedure Spud 'defiantly stared into Earthworm's beady little eyes' (Van de Ruit 2005:52).

Nevertheless, despite the injustice of the treatment they frequently receive at the hands of their masters, the fags are well aware that it is regarded as 'immoral to tell on another boy or admit to being bullied or initiated' (Van de Ruit 2005:27). Indeed, this particular construction, apart from the tongue-in-cheek intensity of the term 'immoral', seems to be identical to the one found in historical boys' school stories. As young Teddy Lester explains to a new boy in *His First Term* (Finnemore [1909] 1953:13):

"Grin and bear it," said Teddy. "What can he do?"
"It is not allowed, then, to make complaint to a master?" said Ito.
"Impossible," said Teddy earnestly; "Quite impossible my dear fellow!"

Similarly, in *Iron Love*, Poland emphasises the unquestioned status of this discourse in an excerpt which occurs shortly after Archer, the bully, has violently asserted his authority over two new boys (Poland 1999:28):

"Archer is such a great bloody sod," said Davey under his breath. "We should report him to Boag."
"Are you mad?" Herbert got up on his knees.
"Why not?"
"It's not good form."
"Why?"
"He's older."
"So?" said Davey.
"So, he's older. He's allowed."
"Why's he allowed?" Mulish.
"Cos he's older." Really! [...]
Davey was such an ignorant nub. He would learn.

He did. He and the other nubs learned very fast. And the fastest thing they learned was never to question rank – no matter whose.

Thus, as previously discussed, the point is often made that at every level, the boys have a certain amount of power over those they perceive as their inferiors. The tendency of new (all but entirely powerless) boys to eventually acknowledge and submit to this assumed authority¹⁸⁸ perpetuates this discourse of power and its associated privileges and abuses. Morrell (2001:65), in similar vein, observes that fagging ‘existed and continued because it was endorsed by teachers, enforced by seniors and accepted by juniors. There were rarely inroads made into it as a system’. Hence, acceptance of, and conformity to, the requirements of the discourse of power represented by the system of fagging formed part of the ‘normalisation’ of boys in accordance with the dominant schoolboy ethic.

Nevertheless, as noted in Chapter Three, young boys did not always accept the rules of the school hierarchy without a fight (as described in the chapter entitled ‘The War of Independence’ in *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*). Van de Ruit’s treatment of the fagging motif does, however, deviate somewhat from the previous model in that, although the boys harbour some resentment towards their fagmasters, there are no dramatic fagging wars or public displays of insubordination. Instead, Spud’s rebellion takes a more subtle form, whereby he succeeds, through silent obedience, in making his master thoroughly ashamed of his own unwarranted cruelty towards his fag. Spud remarks: ‘[I] [h]aven’t spoken to Earthworm the entire week. I perform my duties in absolute silence and answer his questions with nods and grunts. He looks wickedly guilty and even offered me a bite of his tuna snackwich – which I gallantly refused’ (Van de Ruit 2005:56).

Once Earthworm has apologised most humbly to him, Spud considers himself the uncontested victor of the battle of the wills (Van de Ruit 2005:61) and launches himself into his fagging duties with renewed interest and vigour. Later in

¹⁸⁸ Poland (1999:29) reflects: ‘There was no room for dissent or impertinence. Standing order was unquestioned amongst nubs [new boys].’

the novel, Spud reaps the benefit of his labours in an unexpected way when Earthworm rescues him from a ‘bogwashing’ (Van de Ruit 2005:191):

Devries held my legs together and they carried me towards the stinking toilet stalls.

“If Spud goes anywhere near that toilet I’ll beat you two so hard your pictures at home will be crying!” Pike and Devries stopped dead in their tracks. “In fact, I’ll beat you, and then I’ll hand you over to Sparerib for some more.” I recognised my prefect’s voice. [...] I scrambled to my feet and began thanking the trusty Earthworm. He straightened me up and sent me off to make him a cup of strong tea. I thanked him again and ran off to make him the best cuppa ever made.

Though his interference may be argued as emanating from a degree of self-interest, it is evident from this extract that Earthworm has assumed the role of protector over his ‘slave’, a circumstance which features in traditional boys’ school stories as a justification for the fagging system.¹⁸⁹

6.7 PERIPHERAL CHARACTERS¹⁹⁰ – ‘THERE ARE MANIACS IN THIS PLACE’

6.7.1 Other schoolboys

‘Why is it that new boys are almost invariably ill-treated? I have often fancied that there must be in boyhood a pseudo-instinctive cruelty, a sort of “wild trick of the ancestral savage”, which no amount of civilisation can entirely repress’¹⁹¹ (Farrar [1858] 1859:4). This remark strikes me as particularly applicable to the bullies described by Van de Ruit in his depiction of upper class (hence, purportedly civilised) school life. Pike and his sidekicks, Devries and Emberton, feature prominently throughout the novels as disreputable bullies, and their frequent,

¹⁸⁹ As Bristow (1991:81) notes, the ‘small friend system was not so utterly bad [...] [T]here were many noble friendships between big and little boys’.

¹⁹⁰ As noted in Section 3.3.1, teachers often feature on the ‘outer periphery of a circle of friendships and enmities’ (Cullingford 1998:40). The same may be said of other ‘peripheral’ characters (such as prefects and bullies) who serve to hold the reader’s interest as possible sources of identification and carry the narrative forward.

¹⁹¹ Morrell (2001:63) observes: ‘If the dangers of corporal punishment from teachers and prefects for boys appeared huge, they were nothing compared to what boys, particularly juniors, had to face on a day-to-day basis from fellow pupils’. *Spud* contains several references to such instances.

cruel attacks on younger boys demonstrate a characteristic vindictiveness similar to that displayed by the ignoble bullies of traditional boys' school stories. For example, when Spud returns to school for his second year, he is startled by

a loud shout of "FORE!" followed by the sound of metal scraping against concrete. A huge army trunk roared through the house doors, raced across the cloisters and come to rest in the gutter. I could hear the muffled sound of sobbing from inside the trunk. I approached cautiously and opened up the lid to discover a tiny boy with freckled skin and eyes red from crying. He looked utterly terrified. Then a gruesome face leered through the house door, sniggering and guffawing. It was Pike. (Van de Ruit 2007:6)

Not only does Pike exhibit the brutality and insensitivity typical of school bullies, but Van de Ruit adds to his other vices a distinctly unsavoury lavatorial sense of humour. Hence, he is frequently described as finding enjoyment in administering bogwashes and generally exhibiting insalubrious, disgusting behaviour. Perhaps the most frightening, and extremely disturbing, aspect of Pike's personality comes to light in his savage, psychopathic attack (Van de Ruit 2005:355) on Spud with a knife and during which he displays unmistakable tendencies to erotic sadism.¹⁹²

In direct contrast to Pike's brutality and violence is Julian's sensitive, caring personality. The frequently derisive depictions of this musical, rather nervous (perhaps somewhat camp) character, dubbed 'the house Florence Nightingale' by Spud, may perhaps be interpreted as representative of a degree of homophobia present in the narrative. Nevertheless, Van de Ruit often uses Julian's effeminate antics to ease the tension created by more serious episodes in the narrative. In this sense, the following episode, which occurs directly after the umpteenth defeat of the Under 14D rugby team, is typical (Van de Ruit 2005:210):

Julian lined up the Crazy Eight and beat us with his pink fly swatter. He said the state of our dormitory was deplorable. After each stroke with the swatter he squealed with delight and danced around like a fairy. Bert would then let loose a booming laugh and clap his hands like a loon. The swatter wasn't sore at all, but

¹⁹² According to Barratt (cited in Morrell 2001:66) with reference to Michaelhouse in the 1890s, 'a refined form of sadism was to place bees on the stomachs of small boys and rub the stings in'.

everybody pretended to flinch in agony in case he selected a more serious weapon.

In this instance, Julian's apparently effeminate behaviour¹⁹³ provides a distinct (arguably entertaining) contrast to the brutal beatings typically administered by prefects¹⁹⁴ in traditional boys' school stories.

Van de Ruit's most archetypal depiction (on a moral level) of the ideal schoolboy seems to find expression in the characterisation of Luthuli, the Head of House. As noted in Chapter Three, the physical attributes of the historical ideal boy were bound up in the idea of British racial superiority and hence the favourable depiction of an African prefect constitutes, in itself, a shift in politically acceptable discourses of elite schoolboy representation. Van de Ruit (2005:8) highlights, and perhaps labours, this shift when Spud reflects on his first night at school that 'this is the first time I have ever taken instructions from a black person'.

Moreover, throughout the novels, illustrations of Luthuli's insight, wisdom and inherent strength of character not only single him out as a principled leader, but also cause Spud to respect these attributes and view him as a role model. Spud's admiration for Luthuli is explicitly expressed in *Spud II* (Van de Ruit 2007:328):

[Luthuli] shook all our hands and wished us well for the future. I wish I had been brave enough to tell him how much he inspired me to be a Freedom Fighter and how much I respected him, but the others were watching and I couldn't find the right words so all I ended up saying was, "Bye".

¹⁹³ Julian's behaviour throughout the novels indicates a distinct desire to avoid typically macho adolescent behaviour, hence my description of his mannerisms as 'effeminate'.

¹⁹⁴ Upon reading of Julian's relatively harmless ministrations of corporal punishment I could not help recalling Dahl's very different recollections (although the prefect Dahl describes also goes on tiptoe, but for a different reason) (Dahl 1977:201):

A prefect, pompous but very dangerous, was waiting for you in the centre of the room. In his hands, he held a long cane, and he was usually flexing it back and forth as you came in. [...] To be beaten in pyjamas only was a very painful experience, and your skin nearly always got broken. But my dressing gown stopped that from happening. The prefect knew, of course, all about this, and therefore, whenever you chose to take an extra stroke and kept the dressing gown on, he beat you with every ounce of his strength. Sometimes he would take a little run, three or four neat steps on his toes, to gain momentum and thrust, but either way, it was a savage business.

Furthermore, a significant portion of the political comment in the novel centres on Luthuli (who is said to be the grandson of the famed Albert Luthuli) and the discussions held during the African Affairs meetings. Thus it may be argued that Van de Ruit's highly favourable representation of this character stems from an attempt at political correctness in an otherwise largely discriminatory narrative.¹⁹⁵

6.7.2 Teachers

In her preface to *That's Funny, You Don't Look Like A Teacher* (Weber & Mitchell 1995:xi), Jane Miller comments that teachers are often 'figures of such impossible familiarity that they are apt to vanish beneath the general and the particular disparagements such taken-for-granted phenomena may attract to themselves'. Yet, the reality of their lives is usually 'shaped and shadowed [...] by the transformations performed on teachers by memory and myth, by public obloquy and popular culture and by all the fantasies and fictions which have constructed childhoods for us'.

Van de Ruit's particular construction (and to some extent reconstruction) of boyhood, for example, presents vastly varying images of teachers, ranging from the stereotypically mundane to the extraordinarily bizarre; from the apparently beautiful drama teacher (significantly, and yet ironically, nicknamed Eve),¹⁹⁶ who

¹⁹⁵ After watching the release of Nelson Mandela on television, Spud (perhaps slightly disingenuously) reflects that he feels 'wickedly guilty about being a white person. I'm only thirteen but I wish I had known about apartheid and fought it ...' (Van de Ruit 2005:55). Van de Ruit (2005:144) depicts Spud's (admittedly feeble) attempts at political activism with patronising humour:

What followed was a heated debate about politics and Nelson Mandela. Feeling brave, I stepped in and told everyone how pleased I was about the freedom of Mandela. After a shocked silence, my father called me a bleeding heart commie and sent me to bed. I felt wickedly rebellious. Perhaps one day I'll be able to call myself a freedom fighter.

Even when Spud's father agrees to adapt to the changing political climate, his plans go awfully awry (Van de Ruit 2005:74): 'Dad announced that from now on he's going to give black people a chance, and attempted to talk to our waiter in pigeon Zulu. Unfortunately, our waiter was a dark looking Indian who grunted angrily and then stormed off, never to be seen again'.

¹⁹⁶ Weber and Mitchell (1995:2) question the significance of the traditional association of the apple with female teachers with special reference to the consideration that this is supposed by some to be the fruit that was offered to Eve before the fall of humankind:

And what about the apple? What are we to make of that multilayered signifier that has been used to evoke the temptation of Eve – woman as weak-willed, woman as temptress

has 'six rings in her ears and one in her nose' (Van de Ruit 2005:19), to Crispo, the gentle, yet slightly odd, history teacher, who is (quite predictably) 'wickedly old' (Van de Ruit 2005:15) and is a World War II veteran. Despite his advanced years and apparent hearing problem, Mr Crispo's history lessons are not stereotypically boring. On the contrary, his passion for his subject does arouse a certain amount of interest from the students. A particularly telling description of one of his lessons illustrates his personal (and clearly biased) obsession with his subject (Van de Ruit 2005:80):

[Mr Crispo] showed us a black and white movie on the Battle of Britain. At one stage during the movie a German aircraft was shot down. As it crashed down to earth with a plume of smoke pouring from its tail, Crispo leapt up, thumped the table with his fist, and shouted, "Die, you Jerry bastard, die!" As the plane exploded Crispo punched the air with delight and grinned triumphantly as if he'd downed the plane himself.

The school is populated with an appealing variety of extreme personalities, each with a significantly divergent teaching style. For example, mean, thin-lipped Mr Sykes's humdrum approach to algebra is contrasted with Eve's interactive and somewhat revolutionary methods which, though admittedly successful at times, frequently have disastrous results (Van de Ruit 2005:27):

Eve¹⁹⁷ (Mrs Sparerib) made us do the death scene from William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. She chose me to be the victim who is torn apart by the gang of crazed youths. She gave me an old T-shirt to wear and told the group that the shirt was a metaphor for my body. After [my] being kicked in the ribs and badly roughed up, it soon became apparent that nobody knew what a metaphor was.

or seductress, woman as betrayer. [...] What did Eve find so tempting about the apple in the first place? The power of knowledge? The forbidden? Quenching the thirst of curiosity? Has the knowledge of right and wrong something to do with teacher?

The questions they pose are particularly thought-provoking when applied to the description of Spud's Drama teacher (referred to throughout the novel as Eve), who is evidently frustrated in her marriage to Sparerib and who subsequently initiates and, for a considerable length of time, maintains a 'non-platonic relationship' (Van de Ruit 2007:292) with Rambo.

¹⁹⁷ For those adult readers who happen to have attended Michaelhouse at approximately the same time as John van de Ruit, the consistent use of nicknames throughout the novels may hold a similar fascination to that typical of the *roman à clef* in which, according to Drabble and Stringer (1996:499), 'the reader (or some readers) are intended to identify real characters under fictitious names'.

Eve's liberal and broadminded approach is about as different from her husband's as it is possible to be. Whereas she is depicted as promoting open-mindedness, Sparerib (Spud's housemaster) is described from the first in terms largely reminiscent of the typically narrow-minded and notorious authoritarian figure commonly found in boys' school stories. Not only do his rather unfortunate physical features¹⁹⁸ make him look 'wickedly fearsome' (Van de Ruit 2005:10), but his very first speech contains a ludicrously mixed list of alternately serious and trivial offences, thus suggesting an absurd pettiness and a severe intolerance of even the mildest display of insubordination (Van de Ruit 2005:11):

He [Sparerib] announced his seven commandments with a flourish of his cane:

- 1) Thou shalt not disobey those in authority.
- 2) Thou shalt not behave in a depraved fashion
- 3) Thou shalt not tease my cat. [...]
- 4) Thou shalt not waste toilet paper.
- 5) Thou shalt not play with yourself (or others) after lights out.
- 6) Thou shalt not go night swimming.
- 7) Thou shalt not play darts (a bit strange considering the lack of a dartboard).

Sparerib's authoritarian approach, punctuated with 'a flourish of his cane', identifies him as a clear supporter of the dominant discourse of corporal punishment typical of traditional boys' school stories, although some of his rules speak against offences that historical fictional masters would have been reluctant to mention. In a renewed attempt at assuming his contested authority over the intrepid Crazy Eight in *Spud II*, Sparerib, moreover, threatens the boys with (unspecified) physical punishments by rolling up his shirt sleeve and showing them his bicep. 'Mad Dog then pulled up his sleeve and showed Sparerib *his* bicep. Sparerib glared at Mad Dog with his wonky eye until Mad Dog put his bicep away' (Van de Ruit 2007:10). Had the same reaction come from Rambo, it may well have constituted a public and intentional challenge of Sparerib's

¹⁹⁸ Spud describes Mr Wilson, alias Sparerib, thus (Van de Ruit 2005:10): 'He has big, bulging eyes (one of which is squint) and a shoulder that looks like something's taken a huge bite out of it. He speaks in a rasping voice through clenched yellow teeth and despite his small size he looks wickedly fearsome.'

authority. However, coming from the thoughtless and, in some ways naïve, Mad Dog, it serves, rather, to highlight the inappropriate immaturity of Sparerib's almost childish approach.

Later in *Spud II*, however, Spud witnesses a very different side of Sparerib's nature shortly after the confirmation of Eve's infidelity. In this episode, the housemaster is shown to be a broken man, a man stripped of faith and hope, a man 'groaning like an animal in pain' (Van de Ruit 2007:333). In this particularly moving scene, Sparerib is represented, not as a ruthless disciplinarian, but as an emotionally vulnerable character fully deserving of Spud's sympathy. Spud is evidently somewhat afraid of Sparerib's unfamiliar and uncharacteristic behaviour and he tries to withdraw himself from his erstwhile housemaster's presence. Before he can do so, however, Sparerib asks him in a broken voice, "What do you do when you're a small wooden raft surrounded by a ... a seething sea of complete madness?" Although the question is unmistakably rhetorical, and though it does not seem that Sparerib is actually seeking guidance from Spud, the protagonist, who repeatedly comments on the madness that surrounds him, suddenly feels an affinity for Sparerib's situation (Van de Ruit 2007:334): 'I felt like I finally had the answer to his question. I cleared my throat and said, "You keep a diary, sir."'

By depicting the essentially defenceless side of Sparerib's character, Van de Ruit seems to be suggesting an alternative construction to that of the housemaster as a self-sufficient, thick-skinned and apparently unassailable martinet. His description tends, rather, to highlight the character's intrinsic and inescapable humanness, a trait which often fails to penetrate the frequently over-simplified images that have become almost synonymous with the fictional housemasters of traditional boys' school stories.

6.7.3 The headmaster – ‘Staring down the barrel of a loaded Glock’¹⁹⁹

Van de Ruit’s most archetypal character is undoubtedly the headmaster, Glockenshpeel, (un)affectionately referred to as ‘The Glock’, who is frequently seen hurrying around the school with ‘his academic gown blowing out like he was walking through a hurricane’ (Van de Ruit 2005:175). The juxtaposition of his actual surname, indicative of an innocuous musical instrument, and his nickname, referring to a notorious kind of firearm,²⁰⁰ as suggested in the pun quoted in the heading above, is suggestive – he is ultimately not very effective, despite the apparent threat he poses.

During his first speech, The Glock’s repeated reference to the school as an ‘institution’ and the boys as ‘wayward subjects’ distinctly aligns him with the verbose autocrat so frequently portrayed in boys’ literature. Moreover, the idea of the school as an institution for the rehabilitation of ‘wayward subjects’ brings to mind Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977), mentioned in Section 2.4.

In *Spud II* when the protagonist eventually experiences ‘being on the wrong side of the *Hitler* that runs our school’ (Van de Ruit 2007:282; my emphasis), the headmaster’s treatment of the perpetrators is typical (Van de Ruit 2007:283): ‘The Glock gave us a twenty-minute screaming to. My legs were shaking terribly and I couldn’t look at his face. He kept banging the table with his fist and ranting on about “silly season”²⁰¹ and what our vile behaviour has done to the school’s fine reputation.’

The salient concerns expressed during The Glock’s outburst also suggest that his perception of his duties as headmaster emanates not so much from the

¹⁹⁹ Van de Ruit (2007:283).

²⁰⁰ The firearm manufacturer Gaston Glock created the Glock 17 for the Austrian Army in the early 1980s. This 9mm semi-automatic pistol achieved notoriety in action movies such as *Die Hard 2: Die Harder* (1990) in which the entirely fictional ‘Glock 7’, made of plastic, was said to pass through security x-ray machines undetected.

²⁰¹ In *Spud I*, The Glock says that ‘the third term is traditionally known as the “silly season”. He went on to say that for the last five years at least one boy has been expelled during the dreaded third term’ (Van de Ruit 2005:272).

discourse which propagates the assumption of *in loco parentis* towards the student in the absence of the parent, as from his sense of obligation to uphold his school's status. At no point is he described as pointing out to the boys the particular personal evils that their conduct could expose them to, nor the probable repercussions of the apparently lawless lifestyle they have adopted. He seems, instead, to be far more concerned with the dreadful stain they have left on the school's reputation; and thus he considers their immediate removal (temporary or permanent) from the institution as the only conceivable solution to the problem.

6.7.4 The Guv – ‘Our raving mad teacher’²⁰²

It is, in a sense, ironic that of all the teachers that the protagonist comes into contact with, the one who takes his role of *in loco parentis* towards Spud most seriously is the unashamedly mad though universally well-liked English teacher, Mr Edly, generally referred to as The Guv. Throughout the narrative, The Guv's extraordinary teaching and coaching exploits function as a welcome source of comic relief to counterbalance Spud's (frequently over-rated) teenage troubles.

During their first English class, The Guv delights the boys with a thorough exhibition of his inimitable *modus operandi* when he unexpectedly throws a pile of Henry James novels out of the window, calling the author “a boring faggot”. We all applauded, he bowed and then told us to get lost²⁰³ (Van de Ruit 2005:13). Moreover, the following extract, which describes one of his characteristically wild lessons, constitutes another prime example of The Guv's complete lack of concern for conventional discourses regarding basic teaching etiquette and acceptable training methods (Van de Ruit 2005:173):

The Guv was back in top form in English today. He made Simon recite Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn, whilst savagely beating out the rhythm on the table with

²⁰² Van de Ruit (2005:173).

²⁰³ The portrayal of The Guv's teaching style, as well as the influence he exercises over Spud's literary development, is reminiscent of *The Dead Poet's Society* (1989), a film which is, like *The Diary of Adrian Mole*, mentioned in the text (Van de Ruit 2007:304).

his left shoe which he had whipped off his foot. Simon kept losing his place, causing The Guv to scream and beat louder on the table. A couple of curious onlookers gathered at the window to watch The Guv's circus. When our raving mad teacher saw them he hurled his shoe at them. The boys scattered and without batting an eyelid The Guv pulled off his right shoe and continued his crazy drumming.

The Guv's disregard for convention also finds expression in his preferred methods of punishment. Although we never witness The Guv resorting to corporal punishment, which in itself constitutes a change, his way of dealing with a guilty perpetrator has its own cruel aspect. For example, when The Guv discovers that Fatty has failed to prepare adequately for the lesson, he punishes him in a most unusual way – although considering the gluttonous Fatty's defining weakness, the chosen penalty seems oddly appropriate (Van de Ruit 2005:305):

The Guv lambasted Fatty in French (or what sounded like French) and he ordered our obese friend to eat his copy of the short story. It took about four seconds for poor Fatty to realise that The Guv was being deadly serious and about 1004 seconds for Fatty to devour twenty-five pages of print. Unsurprisingly, Fatty didn't seem too concerned about his second breakfast and chomped away while The Guv continued his lesson on South African short story writing.

It would appear from this extract that The Guv is consciously dealing with Fatty according to his folly, a construction of discipline which, though admittedly effective at times, constitutes, in essence, a risky approach.

That The Guv regards Spud with almost paternal affection is evident from his parting words near the end of the first book, shortly after Gecko's funeral (Van de Ruit 2005:385): 'He pulled me close and embraced me, saying, "You're almost a son to me, old boy. You'll get over this, you know, and you'll be a greater man for it." Then he thumped me on the back and said, "Do take care of yourself and remember, when in doubt – keep reading. A book will never die on you."'

This enigmatic piece of advice is quite representative of the somewhat dubious counsel The Guv offers Spud throughout the narrative. In fact, as mentioned in Section 6.3, The Guv's recommendations are occasionally not merely ambivalent, but subversive in that they propagate an alternative discourse of

dishonesty that views deceit and duplicity as a justifiable means to an (admittedly uncertain) end.

Given his tendency to voice disturbingly subversive opinions, one might argue that The Guv is perhaps unqualified to assume a parental role towards Spud, especially when one takes cognisance of the fact that Spud is in a formative stage of his life during which he is likely to 'respond to the modes of masculinity' (Medalie 2000:42) offered to him. Nevertheless, such reflections are discounted by the consideration that Spud's natural father's bizarre and frequently petty criminal behaviour, where it does not surpass, at least rivals, The Guv's apparent eccentricity in terms of discursive dissension.

6.8 CONCLUSION – 'WELCOME TO PARADISE LOST'

According to Pat Pinsent (2005:18), 'morality has been a very important theme of the school story from its beginnings'. She clarifies her assertion by noting that in this particular genre, 'the qualities which make for good relationships in a small community, such as leadership, friendliness, and concern for others, are inevitably singled out for praise, while those which could lead to the breakdown of relationships, such as dishonesty, telling tales, and snobbery, are censured, either implicitly or explicitly' (Pinsent 2005:18). She goes on to say that in recent school fiction 'this standard of values is certainly not abandoned' (Pinsent 2005:18).

While this statement may be true for other recent publications in the genre, it is certainly not applicable to Van de Ruit's novels. By contrast, the findings of this study indicate that practically all the discourses and conventions endorsed by traditional boys' school stories are to some extent called into question by the representation of alternative discursive structures. Not only is the discourse of honesty juxtaposed with a substitute discourse that commends corruption, but the generally uncontested discourse of obedience (or more particularly, the desire to do right) is subverted, amongst the boys at least, by a radical

ideological framework that praises disobedience as evidence of courage (Van de Ruit 2005:83). Throughout the narrative, Spud finds it difficult to deal with the expectations of this unconventional discourse, as his apparent need to prove his bravery to his peer group through insubordination requires that he forfeit his moral courage which, in turn, urges him to do otherwise.

Furthermore, while some of the other discourses, such as those relating to the perceptions of corporal punishment, acceptable teaching practice, and the correlation between sport and war, are not completely subverted, they are certainly contested. Moreover, Van de Ruit's entertaining style provides an essentially non-threatening platform for these previously accepted discourses to be identified and reassessed.

During their first interview, The Guv studies Spud closely over the top of his old-fashioned horn-rimmed glasses and says, "So, Milton, [...] welcome to paradise lost' (Van de Ruit 2005:13). While this is evidently intended as wordplay on Spud's literary surname, the image it evokes is subtly significant. As the British public school system, along with its salient discourses, was, at some point in history, deemed to be the ideal educational system – a perception evident in the South African attempt to emulate it – one may, to a certain extent, view it as a metaphorical (albeit historical) paradise.^{204,205}

Through the systematic subversion of the British model's defining discourses, Van de Ruit's fictional representation of Spud's school experience succeeds in depicting the supposed ideal as all but completely lost amongst the myriad of alternative discourses proposed. For Spud, at least, the paradisiacal construction of boyhood so celebrated in the traditional school fiction of the past, with its clearly defined principles and uncontested morals, is utterly and irrevocably lost.

²⁰⁴ C.S. Lewis ([1955] 1991:97) says of his British public school days: '...can I have been unhappy, living in *Paradise?*' (my emphasis)

²⁰⁵ The ideas suggested in the footnotes under Section 6.7.2 concerning Eve's ambiguous role as tempted and temptress are significant in this regard.

Instead, he finds himself in a kind of fallen paradise, an unfamiliar realm full of contradictory and confusing discourses which vie for his attention.

Yet, amidst the uncertainty, he is reminded of the advantages of the hypothetical discourse of free moral agency within which he can function. It is Mr Crispo who gives him the vital directive (Van de Ruit 2005:121): ‘Remember, boy, God gave us the greatest gift of all. Not love, health, or beauty, not even life. But choice. God’s greatest gift is choice.’ Ironically, it is Spud himself who challenges even this discourse when he expresses his opinion that ‘the man upstairs’ (Van de Ruit 2007:133) ‘often doesn’t give us a choice. He deals the cards and we play them’ (Van de Ruit 2005:389). But the mythos of a vulnerable paradise lingers: the choice lies in how we decide to play the cards we are dealt.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

All my analyses are against the idea of universal necessities in human existence. They show the arbitrariness of institutions and show which space of freedom we can still enjoy and how many changes can still be made.

Foucault (1988a:2)

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Several weeks ago, I attended morning assembly at my son's coeducational private primary school for the first time. I had been invited to witness the sport awards ceremony during which my son was to receive acknowledgement for equestrian achievements during the inter-schools 'working riding performance' and dressage events. While waiting for the equestrian team to assemble downstage, the *chef d'équipe* went to considerable lengths to emphasise to the rest of the learners the unique challenges associated with equestrian pursuits. As a result, the team was accorded a respectable degree of polite applause. A little later during the ceremony, however, four of the school's best rugby players were called on stage to be congratulated for their respective achievements on the field. The applause was deafening, the learners craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the heroes and the teachers beamed their approval. I had to smile, remembering the comment that '[w]hile playing rugby assured social acceptance, to excel at it ensured immortality' (Morrell 2001:99).

Although Morrell's remark refers to the 'semi-divine status' (Morrell 2001:99) accorded to successful rugby players around the turn of the twentieth century, the comment seems to remain similarly relevant to the discourse of sport that is undeniably still active in certain pockets of society today. This discourse is perpetuated on many levels in society, not least of which is the insistence on compulsory attendance for learners at key First Fifteen matches to cheer and

support the team; where a natural inclination for rugby does not exist, it must needs be fostered or, to put it differently, constructed.²⁰⁶ Much as it was a hundred years ago, rugby is still considered by many bred to adopt the legacy of the British public school to be the sport which uniquely combines team discipline and the opportunity to experience and develop tough, purportedly desirable masculinity. Yet, as I have pointed out in previous chapters, this (in some instances still dominant) discourse of masculinity is no longer presented by society as the *only* acceptable model for schoolboys to emulate, a trend which filters through the constructions and representations of boyhood in recent children's literature.

In the introduction to Chapter Two, I mentioned various circumstances that have led to the relative marginalisation of masculinity studies as a worthwhile field of enquiry.²⁰⁷ As previously suggested, the popular cliché 'boys will be boys' has contributed to the idea that predictable forms of masculinity will inexorably find expression in the young male subject, thus succinctly dismissing the multi-faceted challenges, concerns and choices of boyhood as they are experienced by countless real and fictional boys. Brecht (cited in Wannamaker 2008:147) observes that 'it seems impossible to alter what has long not been altered. We are always coming on things that are too obvious for us to bother to understand them'. It has been my endeavour throughout this study, however, to comprehend the discursive structures that determine the portrayal of boyhood in selected boys' school fiction and the ways in which such cultural elements constrain and are conversely determined by the representations of boyhood in the books studied.

The aim of this study was, therefore, to trace various constructions of boyhood presented in selected recent boys' school stories through the discourses they

²⁰⁶ As C.S. Lewis ([1955] 1991:81) says of the games cult in public schools, 'to be lukewarm on such matters was the supreme sin. Hence, enthusiasm had to be exaggerated where it existed and stimulated where it did not'.

²⁰⁷ As Stephens (2002:x) observes, 'the critical and analytical discourses relating to children's literature have seemed surprisingly slow to generate a body of discussion drawing conceptually on the discourses dealing with masculinities in literary and cultural theory...'. See Section 2.1.

represent, propagate and, at times, subvert. In order to achieve this, several interrelated questions were posed and subsequently investigated with particular reference to the depiction of fictional boyhood in historical publications of the same genre. The key findings are summarised below.

7.2 THE FINDINGS

Chapter Two presented a detailed discussion of the theoretical approach adopted in this study, as well as a clear indication of the study's position in relation to contemporary masculinity studies. Foucault's discourse theory was discussed in detail and applied to several relevant texts in order to illustrate its characteristic points. Raymond Williams's theory of dominant, residual and emergent discourses was further identified as invaluable in the description of the relationships between discourses. This chapter also included a brief discussion of discourse trends, particularly those reflected in the representation of gender and race in children's books. The concluding section of Chapter Two highlighted the value of discourse theory in the analysis of the discursive structures that characterise school fiction. More specifically, Foucault's definition ([1972] 2003:80) of discourse as 'a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements', was identified as a theoretical framework whereby recurrent and characteristic elements of school stories can be analysed in terms of the 'regulations' imposed on the texts by dominant discourses.

Furthermore, the particular relevance of the discourse of 'normalisation' in the school context was explored and discussed with particular reference to Locke's (2004:2) assertion that the systematic analysis of texts (in this case, selected boys' school stories) may be 'potentially revelatory of ways in which discourses consolidate power and colonise human subjects'.

Chapter Two thus concluded that an exploration of fictional representations of boyhood – seen as the period during which certain experiences, ideologies and modes of being contribute to the colonisation of the boy protagonist by various

discourses²⁰⁸ – is made possible by the principles of critical discourse analysis. This theoretical approach, moreover, was also considered useful in the analysis of the ways in which the discourses surrounding school life affect the fictional representations of ‘boyhood’ in the school context, as well as the ways in which these representations have changed or remained the same over time.

Chapter Three presented an issues-based analysis of representative historical boys’ school stories, focusing primarily on the works of Thomas Hughes, Talbot Baines Reed, John Finnemore and Harold Avery. Through the implementation of a comparative approach, prevalent trends regarding salient aspects of the genre in selected texts were identified and discussed. These include, amongst others, the tendency to didacticism²⁰⁹ and the propagation of imperial values.²¹⁰ Recurrent motifs such as the significance of sport matches, the importance of fair play, personal integrity and honesty, courage, and the value of controlled fights were then analysed in terms of the discourse theory elaborated upon in Chapter Two. A particular depiction of the school as setting, the role of teachers and prefects and the fagging system were also included. In this manner, the discursive substratum of traditional boys’ school stories could be elucidated in terms of the particular representations of boyhood the implicit discourses facilitate.

It was found that the effect of dominant discourses on the representation of the protagonist in historical texts of this kind generally results in the replication of the

²⁰⁸ In *Ways of Being Male*, Roderick McGillis (2002:185) contemplates the importance of boyhood experiences:

I am a fifty-something male, white, heterosexual, married with children. I guess I am about as straight as they come. How did I get this way? I cannot answer this question with the authority of scientific data or a knowledge of genetics, and frankly I doubt that anyone else could provide data of this kind that would definitely answer the question. We deal in mystery here. Yet most of us will concur in the belief that our *childhood years* are *formative*, if not *definitive*. (my emphases)

²⁰⁹ According to Claudia Nelson (1991:1) in *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children’s Fiction, 1857-1917*, ‘[c]hildren’s books in England came into being less to delight than to instruct. And when children’s fiction began its golden age in the mid-nineteenth century, entertainment may have formed its limbs and outward flourishes, but didacticism remained its backbone’.

²¹⁰ Hunt and Sands (1999:43) claim that at its peak, ‘imperialism affected every type of literature, from hymns to children’s magazines, and every class in society’.

archetypal ideal British schoolboy. This type of boy is allegedly identified by his admirable physical and moral courage, outstanding athletic prowess, honesty and strict though cheerful adherence to a rigid code of honour that scorns backing down from a fight, discourages the outward display of emotions and rejects any form of snitching. These physical and psychological character traits were also seen to be clearly delineated and principally dictated by the ideals of 'Muscular Christianity' – described by Bristow (1991:61) as a combination of 'fighting fitness and moral fibre' – as set out in the pioneer publication of this genre, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, which has been used as a benchmark for the typical boys' school story in this study.

Chapters Four, Five and Six focused on selected recent publications that depict boy protagonists in the context of exclusive schools.²¹¹ Discourses which characterise traditional boys' public school stories were compared with similar or alternative discourses propagated in these texts, and apparent subversions of commonly accepted norms (with particular reference to the issues highlighted in Chapter Three) were identified and discussed. The particular findings of these chapters are summarised below.

Chapter Four, which presented a reading of the Harry Potter series (1997-2007) by J.K. Rowling as a school story, explored conventional and subversive aspects of the discourses represented in the books. It was found that, while Rowling displays a thorough understanding of the possibilities and limitations presented by the prevalent discursive structures of the school story genre, she seldom confines her application of them to the dictates of convention. Instead, she extends their metaphorical implications and succeeds in transforming seemingly stereotypical aspects of school life, such as the significance of sport and the display of unswerving loyalty to one's house into vividly portrayed expansions of the norm.

²¹¹ These chapters collectively dealt with the first and the last questions posed in Section 1.3.

Furthermore, the cumulative effect of the discourses which filter through the text on the construction and representation of Harry's character (as a boy constructed in the text) was analysed and discussed.²¹² In this respect, Rowling's unique depictions of several discourses were identified as essential. These include the discourse of loyalty to one's house, the discourse necessitating the display of courage and bravery and the discourse of sport as a preparation for the conflict of life.

The chapter concluded with a discussion of the fundamentally essential aspect of knowledge acquisition to the development of Harry's character. This was approached with particular reference to Foucault's perception that no power is exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or retention of knowledge. Thus, it was found that the construction of Harry's fictional boyhood, instead of merely representing the development of a stereotypical schoolboy and his eventual acceptance into society, reflects, rather, the boy's quest for knowledge of all kinds in his role as metaphorical and actual Seeker. The climax of this particular construction of boyhood was seen to depend on the protagonist's ability to eventually assimilate and appropriate the knowledge he has gained in order to overcome the external and internal obstacles that beset him. Ultimately, it is Harry's internalisation and perpetuation of a powerful discourse of love that brings about the victory of good over evil in the narrative.

Chapter Five explored Michael Morpurgo's thought-provoking boys' school story, *The War of Jenkins' Ear* ([1993] 2007). It was found that Morpurgo's creative representation of the boys' school story genre and some of its usual elements in this book is unique in style, character and discursive content. Moreover, Morpurgo's treatment of several recurrent motifs, such as caning, fighting and rugby, was found to display a degree of originality and ingenuity when compared with its historical counterparts. The study shows that, in particular, the discourse of Muscular Christianity, a prevalent ideology represented in *Tom Brown's*

²¹² Section 4.3.2 addressed the third question posed in Section 1.3.

Schooldays, is thrown into stark relief by Morpurgo's representation of an alternative pacifist Christian discourse. Hence, it was found that Morpurgo's conscious juxtaposition of the discourse of 'Muscular Christianity' with another discourse of Christianity leads the reader to question not only the governing values, but also the actual origin of Muscular Christianity.

Consequently, the study suggests that by revisiting the motifs which are often central to boys' school stories in unique and subversive ways, Morpurgo succeeds in voicing an indictment of many of the previously accepted principles and prevalent moral codes typical of historical books of this genre.

The chapter therefore concluded that Morpurgo's particular representation and construction of boyhood in this novel seems to dispense, to a certain extent, with the discursive constraints governing the depiction of the ideal schoolboy whose characteristics are inextricably linked with the governing principles of Muscular Christianity. Instead, Morpurgo chooses to allow the protagonist greater discursive freedom, thus facilitating a depiction of the boy's exploration of the realm of personal faith in order to ascertain his own sense of identity.

Chapter Six discussed the first two bestselling novels by South African John van de Ruit. In this chapter, the salient features of *Spud: A Wickedly Funny Novel* (2005) and *Spud – The Madness Continues* (2007) were identified and compared with the corresponding motifs commonly found in historical boys' school stories. The findings of this study indicated that virtually all the discourses and principles endorsed by traditional boys' school stories are to some extent challenged by Van de Ruit's inclusion of alternative discursive structures. It was found, for instance, that the validity of the 'honour bright' discourse of integrity²¹³ that governs the actions of the historical fictional schoolboy is disputed by an alternative discourse that appears to commend corruption and untruthfulness. Moreover, the findings of the study also illustrated that Van de Ruit's novels tend

²¹³ This section addresses the third question posed in Section 1.3.

to subvert the generally uncontested discourse of obedience with an ideological construction that praises flagrant disobedience as essential proof of courage.²¹⁴

Hence, it was suggested that through the conscious subversion of the imperial model's defining discourses, Van de Ruit's fictional representation of Spud's school experience portrays the previously accepted, 'ideal' construction of boyhood, with its unmistakably defined principles and uncontested ethical code, as fundamentally obscured by the variety of alternative discourses proposed. The resultant construction of Spud's South African boyhood was therefore seen as characterised by the protagonist's constant struggle to assimilate the frequently incongruous and bewildering discourses (about moral courage and personal integrity, in particular) that compete for his attention. Thus, the central component of this particular construction of boyhood was identified, not as a strict adherence to a clearly defined schoolboy ethic, but as an essentially undefined variable that is ultimately dependent on the boy's agency of choice.

7.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study presents a discussion and analysis of the contemporary constructions and representations of fictional boyhood in the context of exclusive schools. This is achieved by the juxtaposition of selected recent publications with historical boys' school stories. Although the comparative methodology of this study facilitates the identification and investigation of dominant and subversive discourses found in the historical and contemporary texts respectively, this approach also imposes certain limitations on the scope of the study.

Firstly, as noted in Section 4.1, the representation of Hogwarts as a co-educational institution allows for the possible analysis of the constructions of childhood presented by Rowling with specific reference to historical girls' school

²¹⁴ This subversion may be satirical in intent, but such satire is likely to be overlooked by most child readers. Adult readers may penetrate to the satirical element of the writing.

literature. Rowling's representation of Hermione (a central and powerful character that features prominently throughout the Harry Potter series) within the context of school is of particular interest in this regard. Moreover, Hermione's personal development at Hogwarts becomes an increasingly essential aspect of the narrative and, indirectly, of Harry's eventual triumph over evil. As Rowling commented during an interview: 'Then there was Hermione – and Hermione is an indispensable part of the books and how the adventures happen' (cited in Dresang 2002:220). The inclusion of romantic interest in the story is also a deviation from the traditional boys-only school stories. Nevertheless, although Hermione and several other fascinating girl characters constitute an essential part of Rowling's representation of Hogwarts, the comparative methodology of this study precludes any detailed research in this regard, since their representation has no analogy in the older stories against which a shift in discourse can be benchmarked, beyond being able to note their presence in the series as in itself a shift in discourse.

Two areas of possible further research emerge from this observation. The first is a possible comparison with school stories for and about girls or co-educational institutions. The second is a detailed exploration of the female characters in the series and the discourses informing their characterisation.

Chapter Five deals primarily with Morpurgo's representation of the protagonist caught in the midst of the apparent conflict between opposing discourses. Throughout the novel Morpurgo also seems to question the nature and power of personal faith. This is particularly evident in his representation of Toby's thoughts during the episode in which Toby saves Swann from an attack by an angry bull. Despite what the reader may perceive as Christopher's counterfeit claims to deity, Morpurgo seems to imply that it is Toby's faith in Christopher's abilities (real or imagined) that brings the miracle of Toby's accomplishment to pass. Similarly, when Mr Birley's daughter makes an incredible recovery, Swann's response, which conveys a sense of satisfied expectancy, seems to imply that even this miracle is a vindication of the little boy's faith in Christopher. Thus, the

consideration and investigation of the discourse of personal faith in *The War of Jenkins' Ear* may prove to be a productive and thought-provoking study.

A more detailed study of classism in the novel, and the linking of issues of class with the romance between lower-class Wanda and upper middle-class Toby may also be rewarding.

In Van de Ruit's *Spud* novels, the interaction between the protagonist and his English teacher is described in relative detail, with The Guv's eccentricities and bizarre advice frequently adding comic relief to the at times 'suffocatingly subjective'²¹⁵ narrative. Over and above the fact that The Guv assumes an admittedly dubious fatherly role over Spud, his extra-curricular involvement in the protagonist's literary development allows for the representation of another aspect of boyhood. By painstakingly recording not only the titles and respective authors of the books The Guv instructs Spud to read, but also the boy's responses to these publications, Van de Ruit succeeds in representing the construction of the boy as a *reader*. The books (including many renowned works such as *Waiting for Godot*, *Catch 22* and *The Lord of the Rings*), as well as Spud's thoughts concerning them, thus form an integral part of the depiction of the boy's development. Nevertheless, due to the fact that, apart from the Bible,²¹⁶ historical boys' school stories seldom contain any specific reference to other literary works,²¹⁷ this aspect of intertextuality in the representation of the boy as a reader falls beyond the scope offered by the comparative methodology of this study, other than being able to note that constructing the boy as reader is in itself a shift in the discourses found in stories about school.

A fuller exploration of the other generic possibilities posed by the Van de Ruit novels would also be valuable, for example, as semi-autobiography, *roman à*

²¹⁵ C.S. Lewis ([1955] 1991:7) uses these terms to describe his own autobiographical work, *Surprised by Joy*.

²¹⁶ After his conversion Tom Brown and his friends have in-depth discussions about what they have read in the Bible.

²¹⁷ An obvious exception is Kipling's derisive mention of Farrar's *Eric* in *Stalky & Co*.

clef, *Bildungsroman* and adult satire. These fell beyond the scope of this study, because of the comparative focus adopted here. An examination of the recently released *Spud – Learning to Fly* (June 2009) would also be enlightening in terms of character development and representation.

7.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In *The Widening World of Children's Literature*, Ang (2000:54) notes that, although the period during which historical boys' school stories became popular was fraught with social and political upheaval, children's literature of this era

reflects little sense of change, or of anxiety with regard to that same momentum of change that was rapidly sweeping away the familiar world. While literature written for adults betrayed some of the sense of upset caused by change, children's literature, however, maintained its calm façade. Partly this was because it was felt that children should not have to be subjected to the same trauma and doubt that paralysed the adult exposed to the external realities of change and disintegration. [...] Morale could best be kept up by keeping a cheerful face and tone of voice, and refusing to acknowledge any causes for worry or anxiety.

Ang's comments certainly seem valid in terms of the vast majority of traditional boys' school stories, particularly in respect of their apparent reluctance to reflect the inevitable turmoil associated with social and political change. As previously noted, George Orwell (1939:8) aptly describes the general atmosphere of the stories thus:²¹⁸

The year is 1910 – or 1940, but it is all the same. You are at Greyfriars, a rosy-cheeked boy of fourteen in posh tailor-made clothes, sitting down to tea in your study [...]. The King is on his throne and the pound is worth a pound. Over in Europe the comic foreigners are jabbering and gesticulating, but the grim, grey battleships of the British fleet are steaming up the Channel and at the outposts of Empire [...]. Everything is safe, solid and unquestionable. Everything will be the same for ever and ever.

Orwell's tongue-in-cheek synopsis evidently reflects the intentional sheltering of the child reader – characterised by the marked absence of any reference to feelings of insecurity and fear – to which Ang refers.

²¹⁸ The complete quotation appears in Section 3.4.

Furthermore, this deliberate ‘sheltering’ also finds expression in the clearly delineated, and generally uncontested, dominant discourses that filter through the texts. After reading any of the mainstream traditional boys’ school stories, the child is left in no doubt as to which model of boyhood is most celebrated and admired, and therefore most worthy of emulation. Over and above a distinct representation of the ideal boy’s character and personality traits, the books offer an unambiguous description of his mannerisms, pursuits and principles, as well as the ways in which these attributes affect his actions within the context of his school.

By contrast, however, the recent boys’ school stories that form part of this study do not display the same degree of conscious sheltering typical of their historical counterparts. The protagonists are no longer represented as paragons of schoolboy perfection,²¹⁹ complete with a perfect combination of intelligence, athleticism, integrity and innocent mischievousness, but rather as uninitiated boys who are often bewildered – and, at times, overwhelmed – by the choices they are expected to make in a discursively unstable environment. In this sense, the books explored in this study reflect universal trends in children’s literature in that they position the child protagonist ‘in a world no longer bound about by authority and certitude’ (Ang 2000:164).

Although Harry Potter’s world offers perhaps the clearest (and most tangible) representation of the conflicting discourses of good and evil, Harry is not sheltered from direct contact with evil and its effects.²²⁰ Instead, the construction

²¹⁹ Ang (2000:98) suggests that the ‘loss of faith in the classical and imperial ideals that had been implanted in the war generation and which had failed them was to lead to the re-emergence of the individual consciousness, but this consciousness was not necessarily to be a happy or healthy one’.

²²⁰ Even in the very first novel, Harry is acutely aware of the evil threat posed by the Voldemort. In exasperation he responds to Hermione’s objection to breaking the school rules in order to protect the Philosopher’s Stone (Rowling 1997:196):

“Don’t you understand? [...] If Snape gets hold of the stone, Voldemort’s coming back! [...] There won’t be any Hogwarts to get expelled from! He’ll flatten it, or turn it into a school for the Dark Arts! Losing points doesn’t matter anymore [...] If I get caught before I can get to the Stone, well, I’ll have to go back to the Dursleys and wait for Voldemort to find me there. It’s only dying a little later than I would have done...’

of his boyhood at Hogwarts represents to some extent his preparation for the ultimate contest between these opposing discourses. Not only does he come face to face with the fictional incarnation of evil embodied in Voldemort in the very first novel, but the systematic removal of his adult protectors (his parents, his godfather and, finally, his headmaster) represents, on a narrative level, the unavoidable exposure and resultant vulnerability of the boy protagonist.²²¹

By contrast, the construction of Toby Jenkins' boyhood, in *The War of Jenkins' Ear*, represents a struggle of a slightly different, and perhaps more complex, kind. Despite the seemingly traditional (and therefore purportedly 'sheltered') boys' boarding school environment in which he finds himself, Toby is nevertheless required to choose between two opposing discourses, both of which claim to be inherently good. Toby's initial decision to align himself with the purportedly Christian discourse presented by Christopher is ultimately challenged and usurped by the conflicting values of another allegedly Christian discourse. Hence, the clear differentiation between right and wrong which characterises constructions of boyhood in traditional boys' school stories is fundamentally obscured. Instead, the boy protagonist, although he may have the best intentions, is forced to experience the anxiety and responsibility of personal choice, and bear the consequences of his decision.

In terms of intentional sheltering it may be argued that Van de Ruit's representation of Spud's boyhood displays the least, or perhaps even none of the protection implicit in historical boys' school stories. Constant exposure to widely divergent (though largely accepted, propagated and tolerated) discourses creates an environment in which the protagonist experiences not only confusion, but also a significant amount of anxiety²²² in terms of the choices he is expected

Harry evidently appreciates the vulnerability of Hogwarts not only as an institution, but also as a way of life and therefore becomes actively involved in its preservation.

²²¹ At Dumbledore's funeral Harry finally comes to the realisation that 'he could not let anybody else stand between him and Voldemort; he must abandon forever the illusion he ought to have lost at the age of one: that the shelter of a parent's arms meant that nothing could hurt him' (Rowling 2005:601).

²²² This is implicit in Spud's decision to consult the school psychologist.

to make. The fictional construction of Spud's boyhood is thus not characterised by an uncomplicated and regulated presentation and exposition of dominant discourses, but rather by the portrayal of a perplexing variety of discursive choices²²³ amidst which the protagonist must ultimately formulate a sense of personal identity.

Thus, an emergent discourse which emphasises the power of choice and agency in the boy is implicit in all of the recent primary texts under consideration. In this sense, the findings of this study coincide with Wannamaker's (2008:10) observation that 'in more than a few contemporary texts written for boys, masculinity is [...] portrayed in *complicated, contradictory*, often paradoxical ways that highlight the *difficult negotiations* boys are making as they develop gendered identities within, against, or on the margins of current cultural constructions of masculinity' (my emphases).

Thus, it is evident that the implicit security offered by, for example, the representation of Tom Brown's boyhood by means of strict adherence to discursive guidelines that allegedly serve to transform the unruly boy into a 'brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishman, and a gentleman' (Hughes [1857] 1971:66), is no longer present in contemporary components of this genre. On the contrary, it would seem that contemporary constructions of boyhood in the context of school, while to some extent liberated from the stringent dictates of convention, have become essentially undefined, variable and, at times, amorphous in character.

In *Men at the Crossroads: Beyond Traditional Roles and Modern Options*, Jack Balswick (1992:11) highlights what he sees as the confusion felt by men as a result of the reassessment of dominant discourses that affect masculinity by claiming 'I want to be a man but somebody stole the script'. He further asserts that

²²³ Or, as Spud's housemaster puts it, a 'seething sea of complete madness' (Van de Ruit 2007:333).

[a]s boys most of us learned a traditional image of manhood that has formed the basis of our masculine identity. As traditional definitions of gender roles have been called into question, though, we find that we're sometimes criticised for being who we were taught to be and doing what we were taught to do. We began the ball game with clearly defined and understood rules, but halfway through the game the rules changed. Not surprisingly, we're confused. (Balswick 1992:13)

Similarly, Stephens (2002:xi) observes that in contemporary children's literature a 'central issue is the question of subjective agency. Hegemonic masculinity perpetuates itself by denying agency to others [...], so remodelled subjectivities may be depicted by affirming that gender norms are unstable and mutable and hence agency may take other forms'. In this respect, recent fictional representations of boyhood may be said to aptly reflect the fluctuations caused by overt as well as subversive contestations and renegotiations of discourses within society; the cumulative result of the suspension and reassessment of dominant forms of continuity that constitute the philosophical basis of Foucault's ([1972] 2003:19) enigmatic remark: 'Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same.'

In other words, forms of continuity, or discourses, should not be perceived as static immutable truths or unassailable discursive structures. In Chapter Three,²²⁴ I illustrated Hughes's ill-considered (perhaps conscious) misrepresentation of a biblical reference in an attempt to justify the dominant discourse of fighting. The conclusion reached was that somehow the promoters of the public school system managed to pass off as purely 'Christian' a discourse which has as its defining principles ideas that are in direct contradiction to the gospel of peace propounded by Christ. Another comment by Hughes, however, sheds more light on the motives behind his dogmatic approach. He reflects that 'the world might be a *better world* without fighting for anything I know, but it wouldn't be *our world*' (Hughes [1857] 1971:218; my emphases).

What is significant here is Hughes's use of the possessive pronoun 'our'. On a basic level this may be seen to simply imply the natural world inhabited by all of

²²⁴ See Chapter Three, Section 3.3.5.

humanity. Within the context of British Imperialism, however, this statement calls to mind the vast territories and enormous numbers of people (at one point, thirty per cent of the world's population)²²⁵ that comprised the British Empire – *our world*. And indeed, without fighting this world would not have existed. And herein lies the reason for the extreme insistence on the value of fighting and bravery: to maintain this imperial world would require a willingness, if not actually an eagerness, to fight from subsequent generations of young men. In 1885, for example, G.A. Henty (one of the most popular adventure writers for boys of his day) wrote 'the courage of our forefathers has created the greatest empire in the world around a small and in itself insignificant island; if this empire is ever lost, it will be by the *cowardice* of their descendents' (cited in Hunt & Sands 1999:44; my emphasis). The impetus to protect the Empire was thus translated, in part, into the indoctrination of thousands of public school boys who would one day be responsible for its maintenance.

The responsibility of the imperial inheritance was also placed on boys in English boarding schools in the colonies. In 1913, for example, Sir William Beaumont, speaking at a prize-giving ceremony, reminded the South African boys of Michaelhouse that 'the privilege of being members of that great Empire [...] carried with it a corresponding *obligation*, and that was to be true and loyal to that Empire, and they should do all that lay in their power to *maintain* it and to *defend* it in peace and war' (Morrell 2001:98; my emphases). The Eminence in *Iron Love* addresses the colonial schoolboys along similar lines (Poland 1999:334):

"You have an object in life, my lads [...]. We are leaving to you the *inheritance* which we have received from our forefathers and we pray that when we are gone, we may hand it over to you and that you will *maintain* it to the utmost of your ability to the glory of God and to the welfare of this great Empire."²²⁶ (my emphases)

²²⁵ See Hunt and Sands (1999:43).

²²⁶ Poland (1999:330) draws attention to the predicament which schoolboys from the colonies faced in respect of patriotic loyalty:

... "Duty to King. Duty to Country"

God. King. Country.

"Which country?" said Mostert to Edwards [...].

"England, arse!" said Edwards. Then he hesitated. "I suppose."

Nevertheless, as Ang (2000:97) notes, the courageous, honourable and self-sacrificial code of masculinity became subject to severe scrutiny after the First World War. Fred Inglis (cited in Ang 2000:98) explains:

That picture of manliness suffered terribly, particularly on the Somme, not because men were unable to embody it in those dreadful circumstances, but because they did so pointlessly. The courage was available in awful plenty, but it was betrayed by the institutions which demanded it as a duty. Consequently that manliness has played an increasingly ambiguous part in growing up in Britain [...] since 1917.

Moreover, with the subsequent loss of Empire, the need to train boys according to imperial requirements became less critical. Similarly, the associated discourses of courage, fighting, and manliness became, to a certain extent, superfluous. The 'world' which had previously required protection was no longer the inheritance of a charmed circle of public school boys. The subsequent discourse shifts are often apparent in recent boys' school stories.

It is perhaps Hughes's insinuation that fighting is necessary for the maintenance of Empire that elucidates, for me, the reason why the Harry Potter books, unlike many other contemporary boys' school stories, portray (possibly dated) traditional discourses of fighting and courage. The distinction lies in Harry's magical inheritance – the exclusive world of Hogwarts and all that it represents. For Harry, there is still a world which requires protection, an empire which can benefit from self-sacrificial acts of bravery and valour and which depends on its younger generation for its maintenance and perpetuation. Inevitably, Harry also feels the responsibility which comes with so vast an inheritance. As an adult wizard says to Harry, "[G]ood luck. I hope we meet again. The hopes of the wizarding *world rest upon your shoulders*" (Rowling 2007:40; my emphases). Unlike his Muggle schoolboy counterparts, therefore, Harry has the welfare of an autonomous, though magical, empire at heart, a consideration which explains the presence of characteristic imperial discourses in the texts.

Over and above Hughes's allusion to the collective, privileged 'possession' of the Empire, there is yet another connotation implicit in his reference to 'our world'. In

the social context of historical boys public schools, 'our world' could also refer to the realm of hegemonic masculinity – a world governed by the deeply embedded rules of the (then largely) uncontested dominant discourse which promised public school boys privileged positions in exclusively male spaces.

Several factors (such as the rise of feminism, two devastating world wars, increasing political activism, greater public acceptance of homosexuality and a loss of religious faith traditions, particularly in the Western world) contributed to the destabilisation of this 'world' during the twentieth century. As the movement for political correctness gained ground, the discourse of hegemonic masculinity has been challenged on every level. While this discourse of masculinity is still active in modern society, its status as the uncontested birthright of boys has been disputed by the advocates of a variety of alternative discourses. I am not suggesting that these alternatives are more, or less, desirable than the historical (arguably residual) model of masculinity in the contemporary context, merely that the unchallenged ideal presented to boys in public schools and traditional boys' school fiction has lost its dominant position.

In *Stiffed: The Betrayal of Modern Man*, Susan Faludi (2000:598) observes that the world the fathers promised to their modern sons 'had never been delivered', thus contributing to a perception amongst men that they had 'lost jobs, skills, roles, wives and a secure future' in consequence. This sense of apparent loss (political, social and economic) sometimes filters through into children's texts. The fictional British schoolboy, Adrian Mole, for example, vents his concerns through poetry (Townsend 1984:164):

What future is there for the young?
What songs are waiting to be sung?
There are no mountains left to climb,
No poetry without a rhyme.
No jobs to go to after school.
We divide and still they rule.
They give us Job Creation Schemes.
When what we want are hopes and dreams.

The sense of loss and insecurity implicit in Adrian's poem also finds expression in other contemporary representations of fictional boyhood in the context of school.

In *The War of Jenkins' Ear*, for example, when Toby, the protagonist, finds himself emotionally and physically alone, he comes to the significant realisation that he is 'just a body standing in the road' (Morpurgo [1993] 2007:127). Just a body. Not the heir to an imperial schoolboy inheritance with the divinely sanctioned right to rule, the obligation to defend and the daunting responsibility to bequeath that inheritance, essentially intact, to the next generation. Unlike the legendary Tom Brown, his experiences at school do not cause him to catch 'a glimpse of the glory of his birthright' (Hughes [1857] 1971:288). He is not an heir. Just a body. Just a boy.

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